

















A RIBBON OF IRON





# A RIBBON OF IRON

BY ANNETTE M. B. MEAKIN

“One of the chief delights and benefits of travel is that one is perpetually meeting men of great abilities, of original mind, and rare acquirements, who will converse without reserve. In these discourses the intellect makes daring leaps and marvellous advances. The tone that colours our after life is often caught in these chance colloquies, and the bent given that shapes a career.”

LORD BEACONSFIELD

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TO

MY DEAR MOTHER

WHOSE COMPANIONSHIP

WAS THE CROWNING PLEASURE

OF A DELIGHTFUL TOUR

YASSEL 1901

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IN 755  
M+8  
1901







Statue of Yermak.

## PREFACE

WITHIN twenty days of our visit to Blagovestchensk,<sup>1</sup> that town was the scene of a massacre, the descriptions of which were received with horror throughout the civilized world. As we returned to St. Petersburg by way of America it was not until after this book was written that I succeeded in getting from eye-witnesses a reliable account of what actually took place. While we were at Blagovestchensk (we left on June 28, just four days before the first shot was fired) all its troops were being mobilized for China, and every boat except the post boat had been chartered to carry soldiers across the water. So little did General Gribsky and the police dream of danger near at hand that only one reserve battalion and one battery were left to guard the town. The rumour we had heard of a Chinese force stationed near Aigun was a true one. Having waited for their

<sup>1</sup> See chapters xvii. and xviii.



## PREFACE

opportunity, the Manchu insurgents were preparing to take advantage of the defenceless state in which the Russians had been left. They had actually fixed upon a night on which to surprise the town, and each man had been provided with a rope to strangle a Russian in his bed. A few hours before the time arranged they caught sight of what they took to be a band of Russian soldiers preparing to cross over and attack them. These were in reality a company of raw recruits who, being very dirty, had received orders to bathe in the river. This mistake saved Blagovestchensk. On July 2, shots fired from Aigun upon a passing steamer raised the alarm. General Gribsky at once marched his remaining battalion out of the town to the bank of the river opposite Aigun and opened fire. In the meantime the terror-stricken inhabitants, feeling themselves utterly helpless and dreading lest the Manchus in the town itself—whose numbers far exceeded their own—should rise and murder them, fled in crowds to the neighbouring woods. Some women even ran the distance of fifteen versts. General Gribsky then sent word to the Cossacks that they were to turn all the Chinese out of the town and make them cross

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the river. Unhappily the order was given to men who could not be trusted to act humanely. The Cossacks, who were little better than savages, threw themselves upon the helpless Chinese—among whom there were fortunately very few women and children—and drove them to the water's edge. Those who could not get across in rafts were either brutally massacred on the banks or pushed into the water and drowned. The scene which followed was horrible beyond description, and the river was black with dead bodies for weeks afterwards. I have this from no less than five eye-witnesses. The innocent had suffered for the guilty. There was not a Chinaman left in Blagovestchensk on the arrival of the forces which the Governor had summoned to his aid from Western Siberia. Crossing over to the Chinese towns of Sakhalin and Aigun, the Russian soldiers now burned them to the ground and then proceeded to drive the rebels into the interior. I call them rebels advisedly, for this was no war with China; it was the beginning of Russia's campaign in Manchuria, which other countries have watched with so jealous an eye.

I will here take the opportunity of thanking

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those kind friends who have helped me in the preparation of this volume. My especial thanks are due to Miss L. Kukol-Yasnopolsky<sup>1</sup> to whose able translation of the Ministerial *Guide to the Great Siberian Railway* I am indebted for many useful pieces of information.

To Miss M. Mitchell, to Prince M. Dolgorouky, and to one other friend who wishes to be nameless, I should like to express my gratitude for many of the drawings and photographs with which my book is illustrated.

A few weeks ago, when reading that interesting book, *The Heart of a Continent*,<sup>2</sup> I was pleased to find the following passage. "I like to record these little acts of kindness which I have received from Russians individually because I believe there are no two nationalities that would take to each other more than the Russians and ourselves if the opportunity were forthcoming; and that the more the members of each nation learn to know one another the better it will be for us both."

A. M. B. M.

INTERLAKEN,

August 10, 1901.

<sup>1</sup> This lady is a niece of His Excellency Prince Hilkoef, Minister of Ways and Communications.

<sup>2</sup> By Captain Frank E. Younghusband.



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A STREET IN SIBERIA.

## Chapter I

### STARTING

The longer I live the more I am certain that the great difference between men, between the feeble and the powerful, the great and the insignificant, is energy, invincible determination—a purpose once fixed, and then death or victory.

SIR T. FOWELL BUXTON.

**I**T was during a visit to Russia in the summer of 1896 that my attention was drawn for the first time to the "Great Siberian Railway." It existed then only as far as Omsk and had not yet been thrown open for passenger traffic. People still travelled by tarantass, and no one, with the exception of one or two travellers following in the footsteps of Dr. Lansdell and

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Mr. Kenan, went to Siberia from choice, for travelling there was monotony itself.

“We hope to complete the railway in four years,” said Prince Hilkof when asked how long it would be before Japan could be reached by rail. “The journey will be an easy one, and the buffets will be excellent,” he added. As he spoke I was seized with a desire not merely to take the journey, but to be the first Englishwoman to travel by that route to Japan.

On my return to England friends smiled at this desire of mine and thought it so mad that I ceased to mention it; but when the time drew near I unfolded my plan to my mother and asked her to accompany me. This she readily agreed to do, being quite as fond of travelling as myself.

We accordingly left London for Paris on March 18, 1900, without having explained our intentions to any one outside our immediate circle. Our friends were thus spared a great deal of needless anxiety. For the anxiety they did eventually suffer on our account we are

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truly sorry. That Chinese Boxers should make their way to the banks of the Amur almost simultaneously with our own appearance there was a fact that could have entered into no one's calculations.

A halt of six weeks in the French capital enabled us not only to brush up our French for the journey but also to study the excellent maps and models illustrative of our proposed route which occupied several rooms in the Siberian section of the Exhibition. Throughout the month of April the weather was so hot that we, like every one else, resorted to summer clothing, and packing up our winter garments left them behind us.

Every traveller knows that the less luggage you have with you the better, and we were delighted to have reduced our luggage to a valise, a hold-all, and a tea basket. So far so good; but when, on May 2, we reached the Russian frontier our delight began to cool. Hotter and hotter grew the carriages, colder and colder the air outside, till at last we looked out upon a dreary snow scene. Bitter winds



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were blowing in St. Petersburg and snow lay on the sides of the streets as we drove to our destination. It was no wonder that a violent attack of influenza kept me in bed four out of the six days we spent there. Thanks to the great kindness of Prince Hilkof we had very little to do ; it was he who had our tickets prepared, who provided us with letters of introduction, the latest guide books, and a splendid map of our route. It was indeed a fortunate thing for us that the man of all others who had it in his power to help us could and did sympathize so thoroughly with our project.

The Czar held his annual military review on May 7. All Petersburg turned out to see the troops pass, and the Nevsky was brilliant with flags and red draperies hung from the windows. It was interesting to compare these decorations with those we had seen at Berlin three days earlier when we had found the townspeople wild with excitement about the coming of age of their young prince, and with those of Paris when the Exhibition of 1900 was declared open, and again with those of our own Regent Street

## STARTING

and Oxford Street after the relief of Ladysmith. We thought the Russian decorations the most effective; there was more bright colour, chiefly scarlet.

The Nevsky, a bright and handsome street at all times, looked gay indeed as the mounted troops passed down it to the Russian Champs de Mars. Cuirassiers in white and gleaming gold were followed by a regiment all in what we call "Prussian blue," but far brighter than any blue worn by the Prussian army. Then came a regiment in red and black, each man carrying a flag, followed by others equally striking.

It took four days to get our luggage through the customs, as it had not been examined on the frontier. When I grew impatient at the delay, my friends said, "You cannot hurry a Russian. Never show that you are cross, that only makes them worse; the safest thing is to laugh; it helps you best in the end." So I laughed and waited.

The last afternoon I started out in a sharp snowstorm to buy some luggage labels, taking

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an old one with me as a pattern. After trying three shops I found a man who could speak German. "Oh, you will never find those things here! No one uses them in Russia," he said. So our belongings travelled all the way to Yokohama without labels.

The night express from St. Petersburg to Moscow is the best train in Russia; it carries only first-class passengers and is always full no matter what the season of the year. We had secured a sleeping *coupé* by telephone, but a gentleman had bribed the conductor to give it to him instead. A dispute which took up an hour and a half of our journey had to be gone through before we could get possession of it and retire for the night. As it was we owed our victory to a gaily dressed officer who spoke French and came to the rescue. He asked if he might introduce to us a friend of his from St. Petersburg, who was also on the train, "an Englishman, and very rich." After the introduction had taken place the Englishman came and chatted with us in our *coupé*; he had seen from our official letter

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that we were going to Siberia, and his interest was aroused.

“Siberia is a dreary place,” he said. “Are you sure it is wise to go there—two ladies alone?” And then turning to me he said, “It is a venturesome thing under any circumstances, but to start in your state of health is madness. You ought to be shut up in a warm room and not leave it for a week.” I felt the truth of these remarks, but it was a case of “a purpose once fixed,” and we were already a week late in starting.

Our *coupé* was cold and draughty, but about midnight it began to get warmer, and was too hot to be pleasant when we woke at about five the next morning. Pulling up the blinds we looked out on the most exquisite snow scene it had ever been our lot to witness. Snow was falling in large flakes and must have been coming down steadily for hours. The branches of fir trees, intermingled with those of others still more yielding, were loaded with snow and drooped gracefully under its weight, whilst every few seconds we saw some branch bent



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right downward and its load scattered and dropped through the lower branches like soft powder. I felt as if I must be Hans Andersen's little girl in the *Ice Queen* travelling through forests of snow! One breath of ice-cold air in that heated carriage would have made it a reality, but this was not to be had, and I fell asleep again with the feeling that I had seen some fairy panorama.

We found Moscow enjoying a regular April day of alternate sun and drenching rain, and people were quite surprised to hear us speak of snow. Moscow is a typical city of the old times and a more picturesque one I never saw. From our hotel windows we looked out on a vast array of coloured roofs, red and green predominating, whilst above all towered many glistening golden cupolas. "These cupolas are always bright and shining," said an English resident, "and yet I never see any one polishing them."

Those who are interested in Moscow should read the late Dean Stanley's beautiful letters written on the occasion of the Duke of Edin-

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burgh's wedding. We all appreciate the wonderful charm of the old Russian capital, but it was Dean Stanley who had the power to bring its beauties before the eyes of those who could not come so far.

Farewell, dear Moscow ; I shall come again  
When I have traversed half the earth and more.  
'Tis time to hasten now, for summer's heat  
Too soon might pass, and ice, which half the year  
Doth bind the rivers wide, impede my course.  
Farewell.





## Chapter II

### THE SIBERIAN EXPRESS

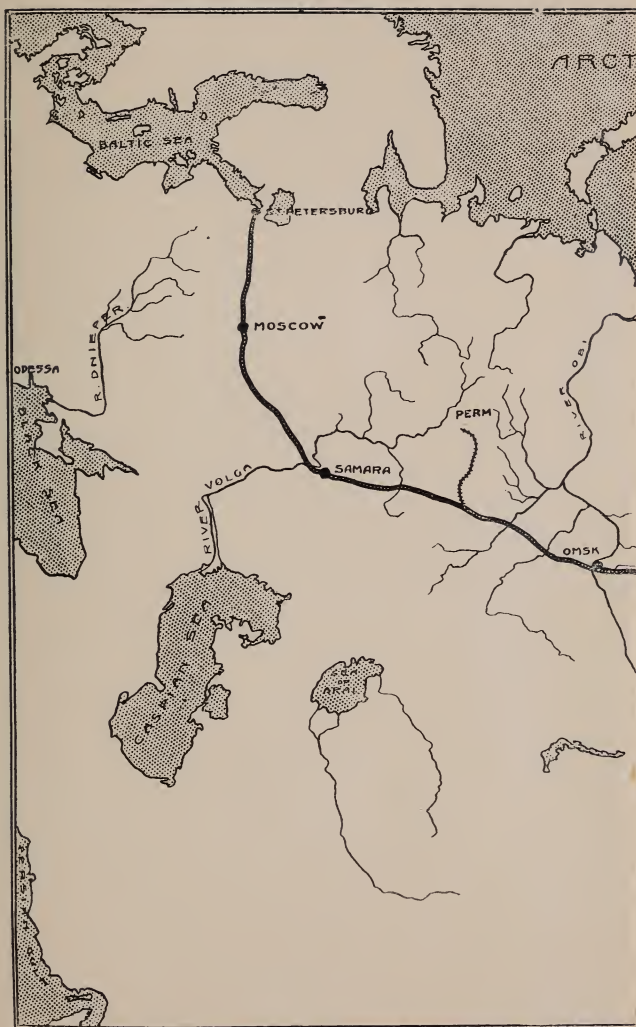
We don't often know in this world sometimes whether we are turning off along a road where we shall never come back from, or whether we can go just a little way and look at the far off hills and new rivers, and come home safe.

*Robbery Under Arms.*

THE Siberian Express, or *Train de Luxe* as it is called, leaves Moscow for Irkutsk every Saturday evening, whilst the ordinary post train leaves daily at 3 p.m.<sup>1</sup> There is no difference in the speed of the two trains, but by stopping less time at the stations the express gains two days on the entire journey.

We took up our abode in the express on Saturday, May 12, and did not emerge from it till the following Wednesday evening, when we alighted at Omsk station after a journey of four days and four nights. We shared a luxurious *coupé* with two other ladies. I retired at

<sup>1</sup> Since the above was written other trains have been added.



MAP OF T







MAP OF THE SIBERIAN RAILWAY SYSTEM.



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THE SIBI

## THE SIBERIAN EXPRESS

once to my comfortable bed and remained there for three days, after which time I was well enough to get up. Had I taken that journey, ill as I was, in a "sleeper" on the so highly praised Canadian Pacific, I might never have lived to tell the tale. Every morning I should have been forced to rise at an early hour and sit upright for the rest of the weary day on the seat into which my bed had been transformed. Above all, privacy, the luxury that a tired traveller covets most of all, would have been absolutely unattainable. The Siberian express is a kind of "Liberty Hall," where you can shut your door and sleep all day if you prefer it, or eat and drink, smoke and play cards if you like that better. An electric bell on one side of your door summons a serving-man to make your bed or sweep your floor, as the case may be, while a bell on the other side summons a waiter from the buffet. Besides the ordinary electric lights you are provided with an electric reading lamp by which you may read all night if you choose. Time passes very pleasantly on such a train, and it is quite possible to enjoy the scenery, for there is none of that fear-



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ful hurry that makes railway travelling so risky for body and nerves in Europe and America. Our average speed was about sixteen miles an hour.

At one end of the cheerful dining car was a Bechstein piano, and opposite to it a bookcase stocked with Russian novels; doubtless it will contain plenty of French and English books in time. On the fourth day we had an agreeable concert. Amongst the performers were a gentleman with a good tenor voice and two lady pianists of no ordinary merit. Three portraits adorned the dining car walls—those of the Emperor and Empress and that of Prince Hilkof—while ferns and flowers gathered by the way gave a homelike appearance to the whole.

We stopped at a great many stations; indeed on some parts of the route we seemed to get into a chronic state of stopping. At large stations there was often a halt of twenty minutes or half an hour. Passengers anxious for a change of fare seized such opportunities to dine at the station buffet. Card playing went on all the time and small sums of money were played for. If a Russian sits down to a game of cards, nothing but a matter of life and death

## THE SIBERIAN EXPRESS

will induce him to stir from it till it is finished.

“You have yet to learn what a Russian is worth when he’s playing cards,” said a German fellow traveller after I had waited two hours to get the name of an hotel from a young officer. As it was already midnight I gave up in despair and retired. The next day I got my information from the card player, but it was accompanied by no apology. There is a strange superstition among the lower classes that if a man can manage to get into his possession a piece, however small, of the rope with which a criminal has been hanged, he will always have luck at cards. A few weeks before we arrived there a man was hanged at Irkutsk, and a peasant, after endless trouble and exertion, secured a little bit of the rope, much to the envy of his relatives and friends.

The train was quite full. One lady about thirty years of age, who spoke French, told me she hated Siberia, and was only going to Irkutsk to sell some property. She intended to return to St. Petersburg by the next train but one; that is, in less than a fortnight, which meant twenty days of railway travelling and a

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journey of 8,000 miles within a month. Distance, like time, counts for nothing in Siberia. This lady thought us bold, if not rash, to travel without a revolver. "I always carry two," she said. Later on the Mayor of Vladivostok, who shared the next *coupé* with the manager of the Amur Steamer Company, took out his little pocket pistol and handled it fondly. "It saved my life once," he said. "You had better get one in Omsk if you haven't brought one with you." The Mayor told my mother a woeful tale of a fall he had had just before leaving St. Petersburg.

"I broke two ribs," he said, "and now I hear them crack every time I rise on the cushions of the train, which are too springy under the circumstances."

The conductor was a good-looking man in uniform. His position on the train seemed to be something like that of a purser on a steamer. We tried to find out from him whether there was any hotel at Omsk, and what sort of a place it was, but the only information we could extract was that it was warmer at Irkutsk than at Moscow. He knew nothing of Omsk,

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and could not even tell us when we might expect to arrive till we were within a few hours of the place.

After a day and two nights of steady traveling we came in sight of the Volga. All were eager to see something of the famous bridge over which we were to cross. Some, who feared they might not wake at 4 a.m., got up before daylight. I myself saw nothing of it then, but on another occasion when we passed at four on a lovely autumn afternoon I had a splendid view standing, while we crossed the water, on the platform between two carriages.

The Alexander bridge was named after Alexander II. It has thirteen spans of fifty sazhen each, a total length of six hundred and fifty sazhen and a distance of more than six hundred and seventy-four sazhen between its abutments. A sazhen is equal to seven English feet. It is built with stone piers on the double girder system with parallel chords and a roadway upon the lower chord. The rails are laid on metal beams. To us it was a bridge of delicate iron lace work closing over our heads



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at regular intervals, with quite a fragile look when seen from a distance. It bore a remarkable testimony to the beauty of proportion.

The Volga too was most picturesque at this point, and the passengers got a fine view both up and down the river, as the train slowly crossed the bridge.

Samara, the first town of interest after Moscow, has a population of ninety-one thousand. I once spent a few days there, and was much impressed by the frightful dust storms in the streets, the worst I have met with outside Siberia. Here I made the acquaintance of a lady whose father has a large Kumys Sanatorium not far from the town. She told me that people suffering from chest complaints throng to it from all parts of Russia. The best caviar in the world comes from the Volga ; it can be had in boxes at Samara station, but is very expensive when bought in that way. Immediately outside the town there is a large cemetery filled with the graves of those who died of the terrible plague which visited that part of Russia after the famine some years ago.

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There are many people in Samara now who lived through that awful time, and it was touching to hear them speak with loving gratitude of the English Quakers who collected money and sent doctors to the poor sufferers. Many of the ignorant peasants had a superstitious dread of the doctors, and often attacked them so fiercely that it was at the risk of their lives that they attended the sick. After the train has left the cemetery it runs between wide melon fields. Passing this spot in August I saw the smooth skins of hundreds of water melons glistening in the sunshine.

The next place of interest is Ufa. This was formerly the central town of the Bashkirs, a dark Mohammedan race, who, in their days of independence, were renowned for their skill in shooting arrows. So much did they excel in this art that during the campaign of 1813 the French gave them the nickname of "The Cupids of the North." One still finds them in their old haunts, peaceful enough now, though for many years after they had sought the protection of Russia against the persecution of



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other neighbours they continued to give the Russians a good deal of trouble. The country round Ufa is called Baskiria, having derived its name from these ancient inhabitants. The town was founded by the Russians towards the end of the sixteenth century. It has now twenty-three churches, with many schools and charitable institutions, including a home for the blind.

Zlatoüst in the Ural Mountains is the last Russian town through which the train passes. The situation is most picturesque, with fir-clad mountains as a background. This is the point at which travellers should break their journey if they wish to spend a few days in the Urals. Pleasant excursions can be made in the neighbourhood, and there are interesting mines to be visited, mines whence come so many of our precious stones. In Zlatoüst itself is a large iron foundry. When the Emperor Alexander I. came here in 1824 he forged a nail with his own hands, and this treasure is still to be seen in the local museum.

As the train comes into the station the passengers take out their purses and make a rush

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for the stall at which pretty black ornaments, knives and forks, snuff-boxes, and many other useful things made of cast iron are temptingly displayed by the native traders. The knives and forks have a renown of their own; on the blades of the knives are engraved quaint pictures. I saw one on which an old woman feeding her geese was depicted. Upwards of three thousand men are employed in making knives alone.

I have travelled through this part of the Urals three times, but only once had the good fortune to do so by day. On that occasion I stood for hours at the open window enjoying not only the beautiful scenery, but also the fresh and invigorating mountain air, very different from that of the steppe into which the wild mountains merge only too soon. Gradually the landscape becomes more and more insignificant till there is at last nothing for the eye to rest on but a wide stretch of grassy plain. This is the steppe.

The appearance of the steppe varies very much according to the time of year. With the exception of solitary groups of birch trees few

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and far between, nothing will grow there but grass and herbaceous plants of a hardy nature ; there is too much salt in the soil.

You can hardly look out of the windows without seeing water somewhere, for lakes, large and small, are numerous. This part of the steppe alone is said to contain more than a thousand ; in most of them the water is salt. In some cases a channel connects a fresh water lake with one in which the water is brackish. A flower which grows on their margin is called the salt-wort (*Salicornea herbaria*). Salt is obtained from these lakes by private persons who hold them on lease.

In early spring the grass grows so high that, as a lady described it to me, "you can hide yourself in it." Many kinds of flowers grow there, such as the hyacinth, a dwarf iris with a fine scent, and a wild lily. In August the grass has disappeared, and all is brown and bare, but after the first rains of September fresh young blades and flowers cover large patches, and offer a pleasing variety to the eye.

From Cheliabinsk there is a branch line

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through the Urals to Ekaterinburg. I travelled by it just after it was opened in 1896, and was much amused to see the passengers get out and pick flowers as the train moved along. Ekaterinburg is the border town through which all travellers crossing Siberia used to pass before there was a railway. I visited an interesting convent there where the nuns are employed in preparing ikons, candles and holy bread for the churches. They paint the ikons in a regular artist's studio, sitting at easels as "to the manner born." For the candles there is a manufactory; the wax is separated into shreds and laid out in large trays to bleach in the sun, after which it is melted in tubs. It was a most entertaining sight to see the nuns, with their sleeves tucked up, rolling the candles into shape, or rather giving them a final polish with their elbows, using the forearm as a kind of rolling pin. These enterprising ladies actually started horse-breeding, but the priests put a stop to it. Ekaterinburg is now a flourishing modern town with electric lights, tramways, and many fine public buildings.

## Chapter III

### OMSK—A VISIT TO THE KIRGIZ

**I**T was quite dark long before we reached Omsk, and feeling rather timid we made anxious inquiries as to whether any one else was stopping there. The conductor took pity on us as we were nearing our destination. He had all the tickets and knew where every one on the train was going. "There is one lady in the second class," he said, "who is bound for Omsk."

"For pity's sake," I said, "introduce me to her."

"I am a stranger myself," she told me after the introduction had taken place, "but my daughter and her husband are coming to meet me; perhaps they could tell you about an hotel."





Kirgiz types.



## OMSK—A VISIT TO THE KIRGIZ

In the meantime our other fellow passengers did their best to persuade us to abandon the idea of seeing Omsk, and go on with them to Irkutsk. Horrible things had happened, they said. "Remember you are now in Siberia," said the conductor warningly.

The lady going to Omsk was met by several friends at the station. They very kindly suggested that a gentleman of their party should drive us to the town, and we were only too glad to avail ourselves of the offer. Our cavalier was a square, strongly built man, with a kindly red face and twinkling dark eyes. He helped us both to climb into his little Siberian droshky, and telling an "izvoschek" to follow with our baggage took his seat in front. We were soon jolting along in the dim moonlight over very uneven, but stoneless, ground. The only buildings in sight looked like barns and cattle sheds. I learnt afterwards that many of these were temporary shelters for emigrants who were obliged to halt there on their way further east. Our new friend, who only spoke about three words of German, turned round in

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his seat to reassure us. "I am a Jew," he said proudly, "I am a Jew!"

Omsk is about four miles from the station, and the drive seemed an endless one that cold, dark night. We were very glad to find ourselves at last in the sheltering inn. To all appearances it was the most comfortless place on earth, but a stove gave genial warmth to the air of our room, and a samovar soon hissed on our table. The Jew did not leave us till all our wants had been supplied; he was really kindness itself. As soon as he was gone we laid our own sheets, rugs and pillows on the bare mattresses. There was no need of Keating's powder, for the weather was still cold enough to keep the pest of Siberia in its winter hiding place.

The chief street of Omsk is lined on one side with thriving shops, and on the other with a succession of tea gardens. Each shop has large pictures of its wares painted outside in true Russian fashion, a most convenient one for foreigners ignorant of the language, as well as for the peasant population, who cannot read,

## OMSK—A VISIT TO THE KIRGIZ

there being no display of the goods themselves.

Before our first morning was over we had been kindly welcomed at more than one hospitable house. Invitations to dinner quickly followed, and we soon felt quite at home amongst so many kind friends. No one seemed to know anything of our Hebrew cavalier.

“Jews are not admitted into society here,” we were told. The fact is, as I afterwards discovered, that there is a large community of Jews in the town, but they are all more or less of the industrial class.

Driving through the streets we were struck with the evident fondness for colour displayed by the inhabitants. The log houses, square, and mostly of one storey, have either apple green roofs or brick-red, with here and there a lively blue. We noticed also that the wooden frames of the quaint old-fashioned street lamps were blue.

The wife of the German pastor introduced us to a gentleman who had lived there for



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thirteen years. He was curious to know what had brought us so far.

"We have come to see something of Siberian life," I said, "for we know very little about it in England." "Quite so," he replied quickly, "and what you do know is wrong."

Omsk was once a fortress town, and bits of the old fortifications are still to be seen. They date back to the year 1765. We are told that Lieut.-General Springer, who in 1763 was appointed chief of those who guarded the Siberian frontier, had the fortress built to instil awe into the hearts of the neighbouring Kirgiz and all other Asiatics who might prove troublesome.

Close to the German Pastor's house are some underground passages said to be used as a habitation by loafers who have no home of their own.

"It must be rather unpleasant to have such neighbours," I said.

"Oh ! they are all right as long as you leave them alone," replied the Pastor's wife.

I asked what those crying sounds were that

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we heard every evening as we sat in our room after dark.

“It is the camels you hear,” was the reply; “they cry just like children at night.”

“So you have camels in Omsk!” cried my mother; “I have long wished to mount a camel.”

“Intelligent people do not mount camels,” replied the lady. “They are beasts of burden. You would see a great many if you were here in winter, for the Kirgiz use them to carry their goods to market. The legs of these animals are tied up in wool and rags to protect them from the cold.”

“The Kirgiz are good horsemen,” she added; “they often come into the town four on one horse.”

“Our churchyards are in a bad state,” said the Pastor. “I have seen a coffin swim as it was being lowered into the ground; and as for trying to decorate a grave it is useless, for everything that can possibly be carried away is stolen.”

The cadet school is a fine building, with quite

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an imposing appearance. Groups of merry cadets at the street corners remind you that you are not yet outside the pale of civilization. There is a boys' gymnasium and also one for girls. Young people from all the country round come to Omsk for their education. Every year some new building is added to the town, or some garden laid out. The present governor, Lieut.-General Sannikof, has done a great deal for the place by persuading private individuals to plant trees and to have an eye to external appearances. The old wooden bridge over the Om is soon to be replaced by an iron one, and the streets will be paved in time. In short it is clear that Omsk, with its rivers, its railway, and its growing population, has a grand future in store in spite of the fact that it lies in the centre of so vast a steppe.

The river Irtysh supplies the inhabitants with many kinds of fish unknown in England. We were particularly advised to ask for "nelma," and found it excellent.

The Empress is not forgotten in Omsk. Her name day was the occasion of a great holiday.

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Church bells woke us in the early morning with their peals. We found all the government buildings decorated with flags. Madame Sannikof gave a dinner at which we were present. Conversation was carried on briskly in Russian, French, German and English. Afterwards, when coffee was served in the garden, Madame Sannikof showed us some exquisite lace made by the little girls in her orphan school; specimens of it had been sent to the Siberian section of the Paris Exhibition.

Every one laughed heartily over the warnings we had received about coming to Omsk; and the Governor himself, to whom every evil deed has been reported by the chief of police for the last ten years, assured us that we could not have come to a safer place, or a more peaceful one.

The winter season is the most agreeable. Crisp cold weather with plenty of snow and sunshine, and an absence of those biting winds we know in Europe, make life a pleasure here.

“It would take very little wind to blow that



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away," said one lady, looking at my mother's fur cloak; and then she showed me hers, lined with what looked like the back of an unshorn sheep in spring time.

"How can you move with such a weight on you?" I asked in surprise.

"Oh, that is nothing; one does not notice it," she replied.

During the coldest days the thermometer often stands at 38° Réaumur, while in summer 35° of heat is not unusual. With so few trees and hardly any rain for weeks together the country gets very much dried up and the return of winter is hailed with delight.

Close to our hotel was the Tatár mosque, so prominent that I at first mistook it for a Russian church. When a "Mullah" appeared upon the little round balcony on the tower and began to give the Mohammedan call for prayer, I discovered my mistake. Then, too, I noticed the golden crescent glittering in the sunlight above the "Mullah's" head. After all, the Tatárs are the oldest inhabitants of Siberia, and it seems only fair that they should be allowed





The Mosque at Omsk.



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a respectable place of worship in their native land.

The Kirgiz, who are Mohammedans, also come to the mosque. They, like the Tatárs, belong to the Turki race, and speak a Turkish dialect. According to the latest statistics they number about a million souls.

There are many native tribes in Siberia of whose origin, manners and customs very little, if anything, is known to the civilized world. Archæological research, which was begun in the eighteenth century, has wellnigh proved that Central Asia was their original home. Tumuli, ruins of ancient towns and other traces have been found along the course of the great Siberian rivers, all starting from Central Asia and extending northward.

The present Emperor takes a personal interest in all the different types of humanity to be found in his vast domains, and this is saying a great deal, for their name is legion. When, as Czarowich, the Emperor visited Omsk on his way through Siberia, he gave an order to the chief photographer there, a German settler,

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to prepare him an album with photographs of Kirgiz, Ostiacs, and other types that are to be found in western and northern Siberia. The photographer undertook the work with enthusiasm. He visited the Ostiacs of the Tobolsk government and returned with many fine photographs of great interest, showing not only the types of face but also the customs of the country, marriage feasts, religious festivals, and such like. He then visited the Kirgiz living on the steppe stretching southward from the Omsk government, of which Omsk is the chief town. The album was unquestionably appreciated by His Imperial Majesty, for the photographer showed us with pride a letter of thanks which his royal visitor had sent him on receipt of it. This letter is framed and hangs as the chief ornament of his studio walls. At my earnest request the man made a search among his packed away photographs and brought to light several copies of those in the album.

In order to see anything of real Kirgiz life one must drive far out into the steppe and visit

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the houses of families who have not yet become "Russianized." Our Hebrew friend kindly offered to drive us out to a farm of his that was close to a Kirgiz village. We accepted gladly, for this gave us a chance of making a closer acquaintance with the steppe and the Kirgiz at the same time.

After a drive of several miles we came to a cemetery, in the centre of which stood a white-washed saint's tomb with a green roof. The graves round it were modest mounds covered with grass. Very soon we came upon herds of cattle grazing far and wide at their own sweet will, with no hedge or boundary to stop them. Wild looking Kirgiz boys rode fiercely among them on small hardy-looking horses. One of them who was in want of a match rode up to us and asked for a light for his cigar.

We first drove to the farm to ask for a samovar, which was brought out to us as we rested under the shade of a group of white birch trees which formed an oasis in the desert. Happily for us it was not midsummer, for the



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tiny leaves afforded little shade from the sun. The slender stems of these graceful trees are covered with a delicate white bark resembling the kid of a lady's glove.

After tea, or rather after a picnic in the lovely fresh air of the steppe—for our friend's daughter, who made one of the party, had brought with her a basket of home-made dainties, we started on foot for the Kirgiz village. On the way we passed some fields of what I took at first to be tobacco. On closer inspection I discovered that it was vermuth, or absinth, an herb which grows to perfection on the peculiar steppe soil.

The Kirgiz live in a kind of hut, much the shape of our beehives, with a round hole in the centre, which serves both as a chimney and an air hole. If it rains, a skin is thrown over this opening. The "yurta," as these dwellings are called, are made partly of wood and a kind of trellis work covered with hides and felt, and can be taken to pieces at short notice. When their nomadic possessors wish to follow their herds to fresh pastures they pack up their huts

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and transport them with the greatest ease. Each "yurta" is placed so that its entrance faces the east. The price of a poor man's "yurta," covered with grey felt, is estimated at about £5, or even less, whilst one of the richer class, variously ornamented inside and out, will sometimes cost £15, or even more.

The Kirgiz are acknowledged by all who come in contact with them to be the best-natured people on the face of the earth. The only sin of which I have heard them accused is horse stealing; they have a great weakness for other people's horses. I am afraid they are not always as kind to their own as they should be. Their women plait horsehair into ropes; as they do not rot they find them very useful for their tents, and even use them as reins for their horses.

Kirgiz horses fly like the wind, and are restrained with difficulty. They can journey for ten hours without food; they bear every severity of climate, and have been known to cover a distance of twenty versts at the rate of half a mile a minute. We heard a vivid

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description of how, when the Governor of Omsk was travelling over the steppe in a tarantass drawn by Kirgiz horses, it took several persons to hold them in while the driver mounted to his seat. Then, when all was ready, the men on either side let go the reins at a given signal and bounded to right and left as the horses flew from their control to continue their wild career for miles without a break.

We entered several "yurta," and found them all very much alike. There was always an iron-bound box containing the household treasures, an old woman mending clothes or washing dishes, a child or two, clad or otherwise, and a young calf tethered by a rope to the inside of the "yurta." I was particularly interested to find each home had also its own musical instrument, a roughly made and very primitive guitar, to the accompaniment of which the young people were taught to sing.

The younger women wear a strange white linen headdress covering the greater part of the face, with openings for eyes, nose and mouth, the forehead and chin being entirely covered.



Kyrgyz travelling in winter.





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The greater part of their cooking is done out of doors. Approaching a hole, which at first sight I took to be a freshly dug child's grave, I found that in one end of it a wood fire had been built, while the other end was used as an oven.

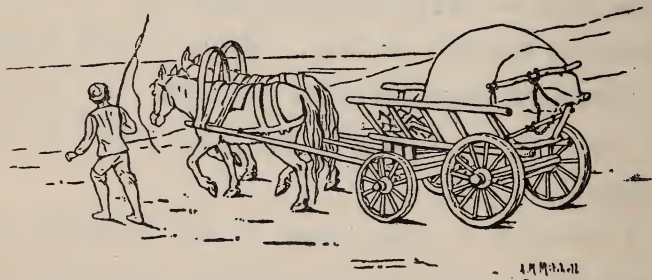
They make a great deal of Kumys from mares' milk and keep it in goatskin bottles. Russians buy it from them and drink it as a tonic in spring time.

The men wear heavy-looking sheepskin hats at all seasons of the year: in fact, they wear a heavier kind in summer than in winter, with flaps to protect them from the sun. They spend their lives in cattle breeding, and their herds are their one interest in life. When a man meets a friend he inquires first, not after the health of his wife and family, but after that of his cattle!

Returning to our hotel in the evening, we were struck with the picturesque appearance of the town, especially by the river Irtysh, whose banks were lit up with a thousand twinkling lights. The train crosses it by a fine bridge a few

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minutes before steaming into Omsk station, and one has a good view of its waters. The Irtysh is a noble river; rising in China, it flows northward into the Arctic Ocean. This fact alone gives some idea of its importance. All along its banks, from Tobolsk in the north to the mountains bordering on Turkestan, it has the wild Kirgiz steppe. The mountains of the steppe contain almost every kind of precious metal, gold included. All this treasure has as yet been untouched by the hand of man.



A TARANTASS

## Chapter IV

### THE POST TRAIN—TAIGA—TOMSK

WE had not been long in Siberia before we knew from experience that the only way to enjoy life was to give ourselves over entirely to a state of blissful uncertainty about everything in the future. If people told us when a train would arrive or when a steamer would start, they invariably told us wrong. Any information gleaned in one town about another to which we were going was sure to be flatly contradicted on our arrival. Of course this could be partly accounted for by the great distances. When a town is separated from its nearest neighbour by a railway journey, say, of two nights and three days, it certainly has some excuse on its side. Still, after having made your home for several days in a comfortable railway carriage, or a yet more comfortable

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house boat, it is somewhat trying to arrive without warning at your destination several hours before the time you expected to get there, or to have to unpack and spend another night in a carriage you had expected to leave at mid-day.

We left Omsk by the post train which ought to have started at 9.30 p.m., according to the time table. It was only four hours late, a mere nothing in Siberia, where time is *not* money. As we sat waiting at the station the good news was brought us that Mafeking had been relieved. The bearer of these tidings was the Finnish Pastor, who had only an hour before received word by telegram from Finland. The Finns have all along shown great sympathy with the English with regard to the Transvaal war. Pastor Erikson met us with a hearty handshake and a beaming face. A burst of military music close at hand seemed very opportune to our English ears. We looked out and saw a pretty sight. Under the bright electric light on the platform from which we were to start gleamed the white hats and jackets of some

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thirty bandsmen. Their music was in honour of the colonel of their regiment, who, after a period of twenty-four years' service at Omsk, was leaving with his family for a better appointment at Irkutsk.

The train seemed to carry music with it as it glided into the station, and the crowded platform was a whirl of gaiety and excitement. All this in the middle of the night! We found our *coupé* on the post train not less comfortable than the one we had occupied on the express. The cushions were all covered with neat washing covers, and looked tolerably clean. Under the window was a little folding table which was most useful for reading and writing. I speak of *the* window because there was only a window at one end of the carriage. Like the express, the post is also a corridor train. The door opening into the corridor had a mirror in place of a window; it opened outwards and could be fastened back against the outer wall when we wished to travel with it open. The mirror was useless when the door was shut, as one stood in one's own light when looking into it. We



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occasionally went out into the corridor to complete our toilette when a glass was indispensable. This however was not so bad as in Canada, where I have seen a gentleman shaving in the public "sleeper." The corridor was so wide that the stoutest traveller could promenade in it with ease. On wet days we could get a walk here of about twenty-five paces; seats could be opened out from the walls between the windows as in the express, and passengers used to congregate here in the evenings when it was too dark to read.

The post train has no dining car, and we were obliged to keep a sharp look out for stations where there was something to eat. The first day after leaving Omsk we passed a buffet station about 11 a.m., but, being asleep, did not take advantage of it.

"You must be hungry," said a fellow passenger pityingly about seven in the evening; "but we shall reach Kainsk in about an hour, and there is a good buffet there." Just then the train began to pull up. It soon came to a dead stop. There was no human habitation in sight.

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"The engine has smashed up," said a jolly Russian sailor in broken English, (he was bound for Port Arthur). "She is sixty years old," he continued. "She was made in Glasgow. She is no use any more."

The conductor had got out. He came along the line and confirmed what the sailor had said. The other passengers did not seem to mind; they were soon exploring the neighbourhood. The children from the fourth class began to paddle barefoot in a muddy stream not far from the line. The poor old engine was now "towed to her last berth." I had whipped out my "Kodak" and taken her photograph thinking of Turner's "Fighting Temeraire."

After a delay of two hours a fresh engine arrived from Kainsk and we reached the buffet at last. Never again, we vowed, would we be subject to such pangs of hunger as we suffered that day; in future we took care to have some food always with us, if it was only a loaf of bread. The serving man was willing for a few kopeks to fetch us hot water at the stations, so that with the help of bread and tea there was no need to starve.

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After a journey of fifty hours we alighted at Taiga, from which station runs the branch line to Tomsk. Here we were told we should have nine hours to wait. Entering the waiting-room we found it filled with weary travellers who had been waiting twenty-four hours for a train! We whiled away part of the time with drinking coffee and writing. Then, just as we had got out our pillows and were preparing to have a sleep, the Tomsk train was announced. All our precious belongings had to be bundled into the carriage packed or unpacked. It was now 9 p.m. At 1 a.m. we reached Tomsk.

We thought Taiga one of the prettiest stations in Siberia. It is only a few years old, built something after the style of a Swiss chalet. The country round is covered with forest, from which ("taiga") the place derives its name. The wife of an engineer who superintends part of the line told us that she would not exchange her little log home in the wild forest for any other in the world. From her description it must be a paradise in spring time. Where the trees cover the ground less

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thickly lovely flowers spring up, and, if I may trust my authority, the rarest orchids grow there in wild profusion.

Before the days of the railway, Tomsk, conveniently situated on the river Tom, was the great centre of all Siberian trade. Immense quantities of corn still pass through its markets every year and the wealthiest merchants reside there. After a long drive from the station we reached Hotel Europe about 2 a.m., very cold and very tired. Our train being expected, the waiters had not gone to bed. There were plenty of them, but a more untidy set I never saw. The room they gave us was large but very dirty. During the night a mouse ran about the floor ; it was nibbling something under the table while we were still sitting by it, and there was an unpleasant sound of gnawing.

“ We keep twelve cats,” said the head waiter apologetically when we complained of the disturbance, but they seem rather afraid of the mice themselves.”

In spite of the discomfort of our hotel we stayed several days in Tomsk, for there was



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much to see. Professor Kruger kindly promised to take us over the University, and driving to meet him there we got a good idea of the general appearance of the town. There are many large stone buildings, amongst which we noticed an Academy of Music and a newly built gymnasium for girls; but the private houses are built of logs and have generally one story. The woodwork in front of the windows and doors is often carved very prettily; it has the appearance of a kind of fretwork. There are no *old* wooden houses, for these dwellings, if they escape fire, fall into decay before they have stood many years, and fresh ones have to be built in place of them, as they are seldom thought worth repairing. High buildings of this kind would be most unsafe to live in, for a house once on fire burns to the ground in no time. Every town has its fire station with a high turret surrounded by a balcony. In Tomsk there are several. Here watchmen stand day and night with field glasses ready to spy out the first gleam of fires and give the alarm to the men in the stable beneath, where



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horses stand always in harness, ready to dash to the rescue. These horses are specially chosen for the purpose. "They only know how to galop," I was told, when I visited one of the stations. As we spoke about them the intelligent creatures waiting there so patiently looked up into our faces with an expression in their dark eyes which seemed to say, "Yes, we are quite ready."

Only a week before our arrival there were six fires in one day. Several poor women had gone to the river to do their household washing. On their return they found nothing but ashes where their houses had stood. A year ago there was a very sad case. A widow returning home after an absence of a few hours found that not only her house but also her only child had been burnt. The unhappy mother's brain could not stand the shock; she became a helpless idiot. She has never had a settled home since that day, but wanders through the streets with a staff in her hand and a wreath of flowers round her unkempt head. When people speak kindly to her she gives a wild laugh and says

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she is the happiest creature in the world. One is reminded of the old song, "When sorrow sleepeth, wake it not."

The pretty young wife of a German photographer told me that when she and her husband first came to settle in Siberia four years ago, they did not want to insure their property, for of course people have to pay in proportion to the risk, and it comes very expensive. However, one day, not long after their arrival, the wife looked out of her window and saw several houses burning; she ran to the other side of the house, but only to see more houses on fire in that direction. This was too much for her nerves, and she became quite hysterical in spite of her husband's efforts to reassure her. They soon discovered that the houses had been set on fire by a set of good-for-nothing people, such as abound in Siberian towns, in order that they might steal what they could during the panic. When the photographer discovered in addition that there were signs of an attempt having been made on his own back door, he hesitated no longer, but went the very next morning to pay

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in his insurance money. It is no uncommon thing for a whole village to be burnt down by vagrants wishing to plunder.

We saw several buildings of red brick in the course of construction. There were many women among the bricklayers ; they were working as busily as any of their male companions. None of the streets were paved. Indeed I never saw a paved street in Siberia. Every droshky raises a cloud of smoke-like dust. If you are within fifty yards of it, you get smothered. I found my "khaki" blouses were invaluable ; there is no material that bears dust and mud so well. I say mud, because that was the natural alternative. As soon as it began to rain there was mud, and after a wet night it was not unusual to find a pond several feet deep in the centre of one of the chief streets. Your driver never flinches, but takes his droshky through the shallows at a headlong gallop. We used to hold on to the sides and shut our eyes in anticipation of a cold bath. Wherever I went my military dress caused great interest. More than one Russian officer observed its red

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facings and asked if it was really an imitation of the British soldier's dress. One gentleman became quite excited: "Ah," he said, "I have just been reading an article about that in my paper; but have you not also a khaki hat?"

"No," I replied, "I unfortunately left England before they came into fashion."

The best streets in Tomsk have side walks made of boarding, but the wood is so roughly nailed together that there are plenty of gaps to twist an unwary foot. If in an absent fit you happened to step from the side walk into the road without waiting till you came to a stepping place, the drop of half a yard would not be agreeable, even if you missed breaking your ankle.

In the poorer streets men and women sat lazily smoking at their doorways. The poor of Siberia are the laziest in the world. For six months of the year whole families shut themselves into their hovels and go to sleep on top of the kitchen stove. Too idle to work they prefer sleeping to the expensive luxury of eating. A man who sleeps all day naturally



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needs far less food than one who spends his time in manual labour.

The University stands in its own grounds and has an imposing though not beautiful appearance. The very thought of a University in Siberia is impressive. The building was inaugurated on July 22, 1888, the name day of the Empress Maria Feódorovna.

The teaching faculty is divided into two branches—that of law, and that of medicine. Of the five hundred students now studying there, about three hundred and fifty are medical.

Unlike other Russian Universities Tomsk receives by far the greater number of its students direct from ecclesiastical seminaries, and a comparatively small proportion from public schools. Twenty poor students receive three hundred roubles each yearly from a special Government fund till they have completed their course. Sixty-four scholarships for the whole course have been created through private donations, and in 1899, in addition to these, two hundred and forty-two pupils were supported by private individuals.



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Government scholars have a residence allotted to them in the University grounds. Here the sum of twelve roubles a month is paid for each inclusive. The rooms are built to accommodate some one student, some two.

The uniform worn by the students consists of a double-breasted coat of thick grey cloth with two rows of military-looking brass buttons in front, and a blue cloth collar. No linen collar is worn, and the young men whose heads are not closely cropped wear their hair long and shaggy. Many have beards and altogether discard the use of the razor. Their appearance is not prepossessing.

The lecture rooms on the first and second floor respectively open out upon wide corridors which run along the entire length of the building. These are heated throughout the winter, that is from October to June, and being furnished with double windows are entirely free from draughts.

There is a well stocked library of some 2,500 books. Here we found rare treasures hardly to be met with elsewhere—exquisite

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pastels of Herculean frescoes from the collection of Count Strogonof—a choice collection of pictures showing the different styles of dress worn by ladies of the French and English Courts from the time of Charlemagne onwards (the price of this collection was 3,000 francs); a translation of Lucretius into French by Le Grange, entitled *La Nature des Choses*, printed on parchment with beautiful engravings opposite every page (for this book, published in 1768, Count Strogonof paid 2,730 francs), and a collection of copies of the most famous cameos of classical times done in silver. There are only three in existence: one is in the possession of the Duke of Marlborough. These are only a few of the literary treasures that were displayed before our eyes by the kindly professor who acts as chief librarian.

The museum of mineralogy contains much that is of interest to travellers. Models of the largest nuggets of gold that have as yet been taken from Siberian mines—gold crystals in all manner of shapes, preserved in tiny glass bottles; fossil fish and leaves of trees

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essentially Siberian ; a set of huge mammoth bones almost complete, found quite close to the town—fine ammonites ; specimens of minerals still unsought, from the Altai mountains ; more than I can attempt to enumerate here.

In the museum of zoology we saw a remarkable collection of native birds interesting both to the naturalist and to the sportsman.<sup>1</sup>

It was impossible to see all in one visit, so Professors Kruger and Sapoznikof kindly gave us their help on the following day, when we proceeded to explore the Botanical Gardens and the hothouses. It was curious to see our English plants and trees nursed and cared for as rarities in this far off land. We noticed a plant or two of rhubarb struggling against the diversities of climate. There was a bed of firs, such as we use for Christmas trees in Europe, all dwarfed and stunted like so many sickly children pining for their native land. Of course these must

<sup>1</sup> Professor Kruger, who was our guide here, is himself an enthusiastic sportsman ; he gave us an entertaining account of some of his expeditions, and of the sport to be had among the thickly wooded hills by which Tomsk is so picturesquely surrounded.

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not be confounded with the many kinds of fir which, while they grow to the greatest perfection in Siberia, are in their turn unknown in Europe.

From Professor Sapoznikof we gleaned much interesting information. This gentleman has considerable repute as a botanist, and his account of his travels in the Altai is one of the most valuable works on the flora of that district. We saw and plucked a leaf of the *Allium victorialis*, a kind of bulbous herb which the peasants use medicinally; they call it "Colba." Lime trees do not grow further east than Tobolsk except in a small space in the Altai, and in the Amur region; neither is the oak to be found between the Urals and the Amur. The tree above all others which abounds in Siberia is the white birch (*Betula alba*). You can hardly describe a landscape without mentioning it.

In one of the fern houses I noticed a specimen of our rhododendron; it and the peony grow wild in some parts of the Altai. The ranunculus abounds in Central Siberia and grows to per-



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fection; its colouring is much richer here than with us.<sup>1</sup> Pliny gave the ranunculus its name "because some grow where frogs abound." We saw no frogs. Violets also are plentiful; but they have no scent.

Fruit does not thrive in Siberia; in fact, with the exception of wild strawberries and one or two kinds of berries, there may be said to be none. From the 9th of May till the 3rd of July we neither tasted nor saw any fruit except oranges and lemons. These had been brought by train from Sicily. The price of an orange was sixpence, of a lemon threepence. A lady whose home is on the Amur told me she had not seen a cherry or any such fruit for thirty years. In winter there is very little rain, always snow, snow, snow; and as the long winter merges suddenly into a hot summer, fruits have no chance. The only month that is entirely free from frost is July.

<sup>1</sup> We heard an amusing story of an Englishman who travelling in Siberia on business, noticed these flowers from the train windows. "Are they the same kind of primrose that we get in England?" he asked.





The University at Tomsk.



## THE POST TRAIN—TAIGA—TOMSK

The flower beds in front of the University were still empty. Professor Sapoznikof explained to us that flowers would be killed by frost if put out before the end of the first week in June. Last winter a woman in Tomsk summoned another for having knocked her with the corner of a block of frozen milk which she was carrying to the market. This story gives some idea of the temperature. There are many months of the year during which milk has to be dealt with as a solid rather than a liquid. It is even customary to deliver it at the houses in blocks.

Before leaving the University we visited Professor Kruger's chemical and physical laboratories. Many students were at work there, and they almost elbowed each other for want of space. As the Professor pointed out to us, more space is sadly needed. It is to be hoped that this want will be met ere long by the help of those Siberian millionaires who have shown such splendid generosity in the past. No less than ten of these gentlemen are said to be now residing in Tomsk. It

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is interesting to note that the most liberal contributor to the University funds so far has been an exiled Pole. There is yet another difficulty that students in this department have to cope with. Sometimes, when engaged in making important experiments, they are brought to a dead stop for the want of some trifle that, owing to the long distances, it will take them months to procure. This is very disheartening to a man whose heart is in his work.

In 1899 there was yet another obstacle to steady work among the students. In common with those of other Russian universities they were "on strike" from February till June! Let us hope that they are behaving more sensibly during the present crisis.

## Chapter V

### THE PRISONS OF TOMSK—THE MYSTERIOUS HERMIT

ENGLISH people are always ready to hear about the Siberian prisons. They expect something weird, horrible and thrilling. When I returned home after my first visit to Siberia, the editor of a well known magazine returned an article I had written on the prisons of Tobolsk because it was "not sufficiently thrilling"; and a young German who has business in Tomsk, when he heard that I had been over the prisons there, said, "There is nothing interesting about them, they are too well managed. It would be much more to the point if you went over the prisons in Germany!"

The first person we called on after our arrival in Tomsk was Baron Aminof, to whom we had



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brought an introduction. He was not at home, but returned our call the following day, and in the course of conversation we mentioned that we should like to see the prisons. He replied that it could be easily managed, and kindly drove with us then and there to the house of the Procuror—M. Nenarokonof. That gentleman received us in a most friendly manner, and hearing what we wanted and that our time was short, put on his military hat and coat and escorted us direct to the criminal prison.

The warders, keys in hand, received the procuror with low obeisance, and he began a round of inspection, we following. We walked in upon the prisoners just as they were. Everything was in the most beautiful order, and the deal boards of the floors were spotlessly clean. Each man had his own bedding, with the board which served him as a bedstead chained neatly back to the wall, and every one had his own stool to sit on.

The men in each compartment, hearing footsteps, arranged themselves quickly into two lines, and saluted the Procuror with a unani-

## THE PRISONS OF TOMSK

mous "good-day sir." There they stood, young and old together, some white-headed, some mere youths. Every eye was fixed on the Procuror; the lady visitors raised only a secondary interest. Many of the men had pink papers in their hands, which they eagerly held out for inspection. The Procuror looked at each carefully, and listened patiently to all they had to say to him. With some he had quite a long conversation. There was never a sign of hurry, and each criminal looked into his face as into that of a friend who had the power and the wish to help him.

After we had passed through five or six common "baraks," we came to the cells for solitary confinement. "You had better not come in here," said the Procuror as the warder unlocked one of the cells. "The man is a bad character; he was condemned to penal servitude, escaped, and killed two families." We remained outside watching the prisoner's face as he talked earnestly with the Procuror. He was quite a young man, and there was nothing in his appearance to indicate the enormity of his

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crime, except the fact that he was heavily chained.

When we had been all round, and were returning across the courtyard to our droshkies, we saw this man again. Though he was still in fetters the chain between his ankles was caught up to his belt, and he seemed to walk as freely as we did. I started back involuntarily as he came quickly up to us and again talked earnestly to the Procuror.

"It is touching to see how these poor men confide in you and tell you their grievances," said my mother, when the man had left us. "I have heard of people being hard with them, but hardness would not create trust like this."

"Hard!" replied the Procuror, and there was a tender ring in his voice as he spoke—"how could *any one* be hard with poor creatures like these?"

Passing down one of the passages I suddenly started back at the sight of a man's face which appeared unexpectedly at what looked like a dark hole in the wall. A smile on the Procuror's face reassured me as a volume of words

## THE PRISONS OF TOMSK

unintelligible to us issued from the apparition's mouth.

"That is a prisoner in his cell," he explained. "It is the only cell that has no windows. When a man breaks prison rules, quarrels with the other prisoners, or is difficult to manage, we shut him up there for a day or two.

The warder now unlocked the door, and the vociferating occupant of the cell walked out as quietly as a lamb. He had a great deal to say, and he had time to say it, for the Procuror, putting his hand on his shoulder, waited till he had quite finished. Then of his own accord he walked back into the dark cell, and the door was again locked.

"Are the prisoners allowed to sing?" my mother asked.

"There is no rule against their singing," replied the Procuror, looking rather puzzled at the question.

We went into the church attached to the prison and saw that its interior was bright with coloured windows, gilded ikons and all the other orthodox decorations of the Greek church. The



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prisoners are marched into it for worship on Sundays and holy days. The Greek church has innumerable holy days, as we learned to our cost. How often after days of travelling did we arrive at our destination to find all the shops shut, and the people out for a holiday !

A suite of rooms on the top floor of the prison was set apart for the sick. Here we found a trained nurse, in a clean white cap and "overall," attending to the patients.

In the wide corridors were long deal tables, where the men had their meals. They assembled for their evening meal just as we were leaving.

"Listen," said the Procuror: "you asked if they were allowed to sing; they are singing now before their meal."

We drew near and heard the deep voices of a hundred men as they chanted their evening hymn.

"It is 'Our Father' they are singing," said the Procuror. "There is One Father for us all."

The next day we went over the forwarding prisons. Prince S——, who is at the head of the



## THE PRISONS OF TOMSK

Tomsk police, kindly acted as the guide, as the Procuror was prevented from coming. Unlike the criminal prisons, which are of stone, these are constructed of logs.<sup>1</sup> Begun in 1891 they took three years to build, and their total cost was five hundred thousand roubles. Since the railway to Irkutsk has been opened there has been no need of them, for the bulk of the prisoners are now taken by rail direct, and do not go through Tomsk at all. Formerly they were brought in prison barges, by way of Tobolsk.

The prisons consisted of a number of square log houses with a good space between each (a precaution against fire) and a high wall enclosing the whole. It was not unlike a group of almshouses. We found very few prisoners.

“You do not see it as Mr. Kenan saw it,” said Prince S—. It was crowded in his days. “Now that there is no need of forwarding prisons, we are going to turn them into a hospital for the town.

<sup>1</sup> Log buildings have been proved to be healthier than stone ones for many reasons.

## A RIBBON OF IRON

As I wanted to photograph some of the prisoners Prince S—— kindly allowed several of them to come out into the sunshine and stand in front of their prison. This made a nice break in a long morning for them, and they evidently relished it. The warder, at my request, placed himself obligingly before the door to complete the picture.

As all the inmates eventually move on to more distant spots the arrangements of a forwarding prison differ from those of one in which the prisoners remain till their release. In some rooms we saw the wives of criminals who were accompanying their husbands of their own free will. Many had three or four children round them, and often a baby in arms. The babies looked sickly, and there were several little ones on whose faces we saw the stamp of death. "These long journeys," said Prince S——, are very hard for small children. They cannot stand the severities of the climate and the sudden changes of temperature."

We went down into the ice house and saw huge blocks of ice that are never allowed to

## THE PRISONS OF TOMSK

melt, no matter how powerfully the sun may shine upon the turf which covers them. Food to be kept cold is lowered by a kind of lift into the centre, round which there is a passage wide enough for a man to pass easily. The outer wall of this passage is composed of ice blocks.

Then we went to see the disinfecting rooms. The prisoners' clothes are taken in at a door and pushed through a hole in the wall. After the process of disinfecting has taken place, they are removed from the inner compartment through a hole in its opposite wall.

The weight of the chains worn by the prisoners differs considerably: the ordinary weight is from six to ten pounds. Every prisoner is allowed to bring baggage with him up to the weight of thirty pounds, but it all has to be disinfected—a rule which must meet with the heartiest approval from all who know anything of the state in which Russian peasants live. The cleanliness of their prisons must seem strange to them at first.

One of the pleasantest memories we have of Tomsk is that of an evening spent at the

## A RIBBON OF IRON

Procurator's house. Madame Nenarokonof is a great reader, speaks English perfectly, and is well acquainted with the best novelists of our country. She is quite young, good-looking, and full of energy. In the summer evenings she cycles with her husband outside the town where there is less dust and no traffic. We thought that if Tomsk could boast of many such ladies, its society must be charming indeed. It was with this agreeable companion, and an old nurse who had been with Madame Nenarokonof from her birth, that we went to see the house of the mysterious hermit.

The peasants say that this old man was no other than the Emperor Alexander I. Alexander I. resigned the throne in favour of his brother the Grand Duke Constantine, who, in his turn, having contracted a morganatic marriage with a Polish lady, resigned in favour of a third brother Nicholas. Alexander I. died at Taganrog, a town on the shores of the Sea of Azof, where he accompanied his wife, the Empress Elizabeth, who was sent there by her doctors on account of her health.



## THE MYSTERIOUS HERMIT

The story runs that another man was buried in the Emperor's place, and that Alexander disappeared from that time and ended his life as a hermit in Siberia.

However this may be it is quite true that a mysterious hermit did live for many years in Tomsk, and that he finally died there. During his latter days there was a good deal of curiosity as to who he might be. When the house was searched after his death a mother-of-pearl crucifix was found amongst his effects. On examination it was proved to open and reveal a carved letter A. There is also a legend that this crucifix contained correspondence proving the hermit's identity. It still hangs on the wall, and there is an enlarged photograph of the letter A beside it for visitors to look at. The diminutive house, with its tiny garden, was sold to the town quite recently for the sum of thirty thousand pounds. The hermit certainly did not give so much for it! The interior is fitted up as a church, and pious women decorate the walls with wreaths of bright-coloured paper flowers. The old lady in charge was terribly



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nervous lest I might set one of these flowers on fire with the candle I held in my hand.

"If one flower catches fire," she said, "the whole place will burn to the ground in no time."

The idea was too horrible! I gave up the candle, but not before I had had a good look at a picture representing the old man in his last days, and at another of Alexander I. at the time of his coronation. The former represents the hermit as very old indeed. They say that Alexander habitually walked about with the thumb of one hand tucked into his girdle, and the other hand on his breast. The hermit seems to have had the same habit. Alexander, in the other picture, is represented as a fair young boy, with an innocent, girlish face, and waving, golden hair, on which rests the crown of all the Russias. The present Emperor visited the hermit's house when he passed through Siberia, and it has also been visited by other members of the Royal Family.

The peasants say that whoever the hermit may have been, he came there to expiate his sins. Indeed, so firm was their belief that he had

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succeeded in becoming a saint that as soon as he died they stole as many of his poor belongings as they could lay hands on. These they shared with their friends in the full belief that anything that had once belonged to a saint must inevitably bring prosperity with it. Be the story what it may, this hermit was certainly some great personage who, for reasons of his own, wished to end his days in quiet and concealment.

## Chapter VI

### KRASNOIARSK—THE YENISEI

**R**ETURNING to Taiga, we proceeded by the main line to Krasnoiarsk. The scenery had quite changed, and our route lay through many miles of thick forest. We passed patches of ground where hundreds of trees had been destroyed by fire, and occasionally saw the lurid glare of what looked like huge bonfires through the trees. Smoke darkened the atmosphere just like a London fog. Such fires have been particularly frequent in 1900 owing to the fact that an insufficient amount of snow fell during the winter. The ground had become too dry. We also passed many spots where the hand of man had been at work. I photographed one tall tree that had been left to mourn its fellows.

About every three-quarters of an hour we

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pulled up at a station where, availing themselves of a six or ten minutes' halt, most of the passengers turned out for a whiff of fresh air and a brisk promenade on the platform. Many carried large tin kettles which they filled with boiling water from steaming samovars, always ready. Russians are tremendous tea drinkers. They did not when travelling pour boiling water on the tea as we do, but dropped the tea into the water, often after it had ceased to boil. Peasants from the country round used to bring the produce of their farms and carry on a brisk trade with passengers from the fourth class. They displayed their goods sometimes on the ground and sometimes on the counter roughly made of boards for the purpose. The articles sold were, for the most part, bottles of milk, bread, boiled chicken, pieces of bacon and strange-looking sausages.

We found Krasnoiarsk a flourishing Russian colony. It is situated in a hollow, surrounded by picturesque hills of red sandstone, from which its name is derived. The word *krasni* means "red," and *iar* "a cliff." We saw from a long

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distance the red soil which covers the hill sides. Before we reached the station we caught sight of two large churches overtopping conspicuously the low buildings around them, and of a chapel perched high up on a hill close by, which, as we afterwards learned, was placed there in the year 1855 by the inspector of some gold mines.

The town is nine hundred and thirteen feet above the sea level. It was originally a fortress built to protect the Russians in Yeniseisk from the neighbouring Tatár tribes, and dates from 1429. We noticed many well dressed people in the streets as we drove to our hotel, and, altogether, the place struck us as being more Russian than Siberian. The *Russia* was a fairly comfortable hotel, the best we had seen since we left Moscow, and the cooking was good. Many of the townspeople had found this out, and dined there regularly.

The Vice-Governor kindly took us to see the printing office where a local paper is printed three times a week. Eighty persons, six of whom are women, are employed there. They



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also undertake the printing and binding of books. We next visited the museum. Here, as at Tomsk, were some wonderful mammoth bones, found in the immediate neighbourhood. We also saw models of gold washing machines, which had originally been intended for the Paris exhibition, and lastly a collection of dresses once worn by priests of the Shamanist religion. The headdress was a bunch of cock's feathers; the upper part of the robes was decorated with cowry shells; while from the belt hung a number of imitation snakes with beads for eyes.

"Those are Satans," said the old man in charge. "All those Satans have been conquered by the priest, and he wears them at his belt in triumph."

Krasnoiarsk is proud of its public gardens, they are the best in Siberia, for in most towns it has been difficult to make the trees grow. Towards evening, as we strolled in the shade, we might well have fancied ourselves in some German town on the Rhine, for the beautiful Yenisei ran alongside of the gardens, and we

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could hear the river steamer whistling to warn intending passengers of its arrival.

The next day a pleasant surprise awaited us. We were introduced to some charming English people who have lately taken up their residence in Krasnoiarsk. We remember with pleasure the kind hospitality shown us by Mr. and Mrs. Keighley, and their name will always be associated in our minds with that of the town in which they have made their home.

The Vice-Governor had taken a box for us in the opera. We "*must go*," he said, "*pour voir les mœurs du peuple*": so to the opera we went. It was really the circus, the theatre proper having been destroyed by fire, and there was an unpleasant odour of horses; but we had to try and forget that. The opera was one that was then being performed in St. Petersburg and Moscow with great success. The music is by Tchaikofsky and the verse by Poushkin.

In the first scene an old woman is represented as making strawberry jam under the trees in a country garden. The Russians, I am told, do all their jam making in the garden.

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Then two young ladies come out, peep into the stew pan and sing a duet. One of these is the heroine. An unsophisticated country girl, she falls in love with the first man she sees, writes a letter to tell him so, and they meet in the garden, the jam having disappeared. The man, who is a sort of Don Juan, does not reciprocate her feelings. Politely, but firmly, he tells her that, "more than her friend he ne'er can be." Finally she marries an old general and becomes a woman of the world. In the last scene her first hero meets her once more at a ball. This time he falls desperately in love with her, but our heroine passionately explains to him that he has come too late. The ball scenes and the duel in a snow forest are said to be "absolument magnifique" as performed in St. Petersburg, but in Krasnoiarsk they bordered on the ridiculous. One of the duellists carefully discharged his pistol into the ceiling, and at the same moment his opponent fell dead at his feet—from surprise—probably! Still it was all wonderful in a town in the heart of Siberia, in the same longitude as Calcutta.

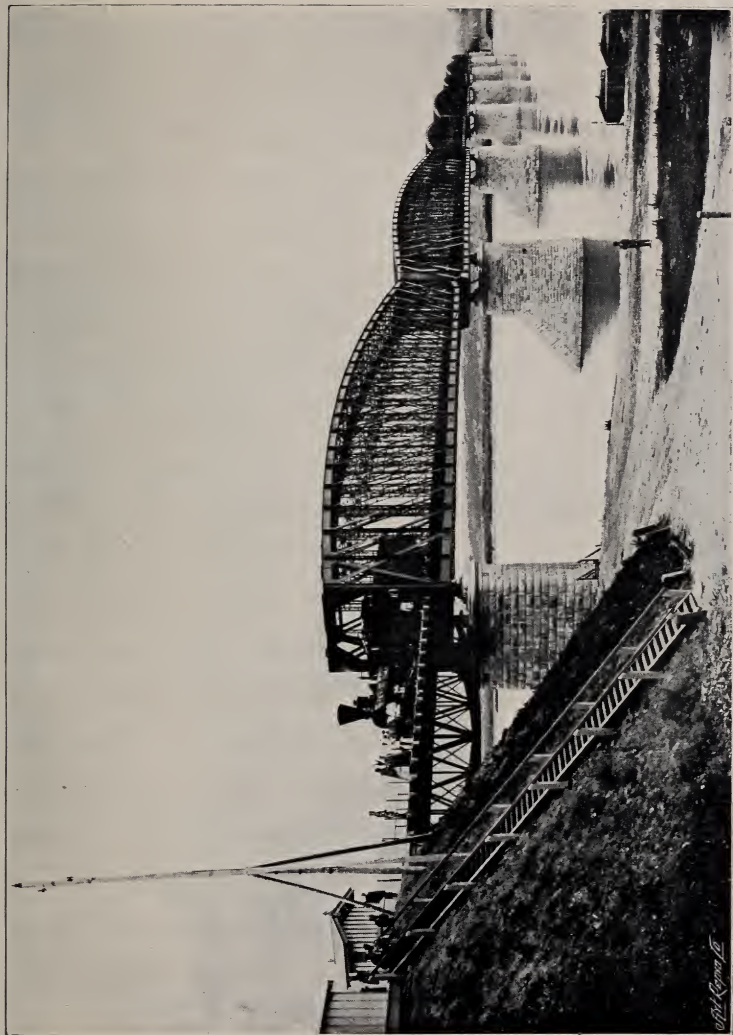
## A RIBBON OF IRON

The following morning we found the streets impassable owing to volumes of dust blowing through them accompanied by showers of rain. The Vice-Governor, who was obliged to venture out on business, got so much dust in one of his eyes that he was half blind for the rest of the day. In the evening the air was calm and, the dust having been turned into mud by a heavy downpour, we took a walk in the town. One shop interested us particularly ; it was kept by Chinamen, and the chief article for sale was tea done up in pretty boxes, for which they asked a fabulous price considering how near we were to the land of tea. But besides tea there were lovely Chinese silks and embroideries and beautiful china. While we were admiring their wares, a Russian gentleman of our party began to tease these solemn-faced celestials.

“If you are not sharp,” he said, putting on a serious air, “the Japs will be getting ahead of you before long.”

“*Never*,” replied one of the Chinamen with unmoved face as he displayed a delicate cup





Bridge over the Yenisei.

*Opt. Romanov*



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## KRASNOIARSK—THE YENISEI

and saucer to our admiring gaze. "The Japs are our subjects, and our subjects they will remain."

Poor man! How little he, or any of us, dreamed of the trouble that was coming upon him and his companions before many weeks had passed. I heard afterwards that when news of the disturbances in China penetrated as far as Krasnoiarsk these unfortunate men were compelled to close their shop, for a mob threatened to attack their house and made it dangerous for them to venture out. While waiting till the Governor could find them a safe escort back to China they were glad to sell off their goods at a dead loss; valuable silks and costly china went for a mere song.

On May 31 we embarked on the comfortably fitted up house boat that was to take us up the Yenisei to Minusinsk. There was a nice deck for passengers, and the dining saloon, where meals were ordered *à la carte*, had windows down both sides and at the further end, so that in bad weather we could sit there and enjoy the view all round us as we glided along.

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It was very cold as we went on board, and before long snow fell so fast that we were obliged to go below. We did not go down however before we had passed under the famous bridge. I tried to get a photograph of its entire length as it receded from our view, but my camera was too small.

The bridge is about three-quarters of a mile long, and has six gigantic arches. Each arch, when building, was completed on the bank and then drawn into its place on the river by means of a special kind of crane invented for the purpose and used on this occasion for the first time. The piles are of grey granite brought from Birussa, a village about sixty versts distant. The whole was completed in the year 1899. People travelling to Irkutsk before that time had to cross the river by sleigh in winter, and by boat in summer.

The Yenisei is one of the largest rivers in Siberia. It rises in Mongolia and is formed by two streams, the Khakema and the Bikema. The name "Yenisei" is derived from a Tungus word meaning "great water." Breaking through



Prince Hilkof, Minister of Ways and Communications.





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the mountain chain it forms rapids over which it flows at the rate of sixty versts an hour. Twelve versts above Minusinsk another river, the Abakan, joins it on the left, and yet another, twenty-five versts above that, on the right, the Touba.<sup>1</sup> The width varies considerably in the neighbourhood of Krasnoiarsk; in some places it is more than a verst wide, and in others less than half a verst. After reaching the district of Yeniseisk the river receives its great tributary the Angara. At this point it is one verst and a half wide. After this it receives still other tributaries and becomes yet wider. Its entire length is three thousand one hundred versts.<sup>2</sup> It is so deep that steamers of a medium size can navigate it as far as Krasnoiarsk. Several ships have already made their way here, having come through the Kara sea from London. When the difficulty of getting through the ice has been overcome by means of ice breakers, as it certainly will be

<sup>1</sup> The rapidity of its flow makes it a most dangerous river for rafts, and it is not safe for bathing.

<sup>2</sup> A verst is a little less than an English mile.

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sooner or later, London and Krasnoiarsk, for purposes of trade, will seem much nearer to each other than they do at present.

After passing under the bridge we were able to get a good view of certain mountains which had from the first attracted our attention on account of the weird formation of their rocky summits. One of these is known by the name of Black Vulcan (Chernaia Sopka). Soon after this we came to a low-roofed monastery, built close upon the water's edge, and cut off utterly from the rest of the world as it seemed.

Travellers have compared the scenery of the Yenisei to that of some parts of Switzerland. For myself I think it has a beauty of its own, and find it hard to draw any comparison, especially as the scenery changes so frequently, though it reminds one somewhat of the Italian Lakes. First we saw great rocks and boulders sloping down to the water's edge, and sometimes overhanging it. Then we passed mountain streams which flowed between fir-clad hills with a winding course that was soon hidden from our view. There is good fishing in these

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streams, graylings abound ; but what is more important, the mud contains gold.

Every inch of the land through which these streams flow has already been divided up into claims. There is no room for the adventurer here, he must go farther inland to wilder parts. If he goes far enough, he will find plenty of treasure for which no claim has been made. But an endless supply of patience and perseverance is required if one would have success of any kind in Siberia, and above all in gold-mining. For the sportsman, there are bears in abundance, and sables with their costly furs are plentiful in the mountains.

Our steamer stopped at one point where there was no sign of a landing-stage to land a party of miners with their wives and children. The hill side was steep, and one child, a little girl of about six years, after bravely trying to scramble up the bank, stood still in despair, till a man, probably her father, turned back and pulled her up. A woman followed carrying a baby on one arm and a basket on the other ; much to our surprise she managed to climb up

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without any assistance. A man came next carrying bundles of bedding and heavy pieces of perforated sheet iron to be used at the mine for which they were bound. In the distance—between the trees—there was a rough conveyance coming to meet them. It was a picture worthy of Klondyke.

On and on we glided, curving in and out with every bend of the river and drawing nearer every hour to the borders of China. The second day the scenery became less rugged, there were still mountains all around us, but they stood further back from the river and left room for agriculture. Here vines were being cultivated and cornfields were gleaming yellow in the sunshine. Then the river grew wider and wider till we could hardly distinguish its further bank from the many islands covered with tall grass which floated between it and us. We now seemed to be no longer on a river, but continually passing from one lake into another, surrounded all the time by a glorious changing panorama of mountain scenery. The very distance between the moun-



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tains on either side of us gave an invigorating feeling of freedom to the whole scene. After several hours of continued winding there was another change; once more we had steep bare mountains close to us on the left with their massive sides disappearing into and reflected in the clear water, a stretch of flat country covered with low shrubs on the right, and mountains closing in in the distance, about a mile away at first, then further and further off.

The shadows grew longer with the setting sun, and then, as they gradually disappeared altogether in the soft evening light, we watched the crescent moon rise above a steep rock that grew more gloomy and black every minute. Again the mountains closed in, weird and gaunt now, and the water, but for a slight ripple that was always there, looked like a lake of glass. A shower of wood sparks had been falling all day from the funnel of the steamer. They had looked like large smuts in the sunshine, but now they glowed in the twilight and fell into the water like a shower of rockets.



## Chapter VII

### MINUSINSK

This desert soil  
Wants not her hidden lustre, gems and gold.  
*Paradise Lost.*

**I**T was our original intention to break our journey to Minusinsk at a spot on the left bank of the Yenisei from which, by the aid of horses, we could proceed to Lake Tschuro. This lake is famed for the medicinal qualities of its water, and the village on its shore is fast becoming a popular health resort.

“Many thousands of Siberians go there every year for their health,” said a lady from Irkutsk. “It is well worth your while to see it.”

“Yes, you must see Lake Tschuro,” said a high official to whom we applied for further information, “and I will give you an introduction to the manager of a large gold mine a few miles further on than the lake.”

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“If thousands of people land here every year, they leave remarkably few traces behind them,” I remarked to my mother as we neared our proposed landing place. It was growing dusk, rain was falling, and we fervently wished that some of the other passengers were going in our direction. Before us a gigantic boulder loomed over the water and near it a tiny path wound its way up the bank, but no other trace of humanity was in sight. A rough man from the second class had got his bundles together and was perparing to land. “It would not be pleasant,” we reflected, “to spend the night on that bank waiting for a droshky!” The nearest village, we knew—for we had seen its church cupola as we passed—was quite two miles off. We decided to give up the pleasure of seeing Lake Tschuro, and the letter to the manager of the gold mine was never used.

The landing-place at Minusinsk is not prepossessing; the ground is flat, and grass grows close up to the water’s edge, but the place where we landed was bare with the tread of passengers. Close by a party of gipsy-like

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peasants were engaged in chopping up the trunks of several gigantic pine trees that had evidently been floated down the river from mountain forests.

There is nothing that can be called an hotel in Minusinsk. We got our baggage into a large open basket on wheels and sitting on the top drove to the best inn in the town. Droshkies are to be had, but must be ordered beforehand. The inn was roughly built of logs in true Siberian style, and adorned inside with fir trees which had been cut from their roots just above the ground and stuck into rough pots, or simply placed leaning against the wall. There was no washstand in our room, but at our particular request a tin washbasin and a jug of water were brought by a woman and placed on the floor in one corner of the apartment. Our food was brought by the same woman, who seemed to do all the work of the house. The proprietor apparently had no bedroom for his own use; he slept on a bench in the passage at the head of the stairs.

We had brought a letter of introduction to

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the Curator of the Museum, and, as it was not yet dark, I started out to find him. By dint of showing the address on the envelope to several people who could read a little, I managed at length to find the house. It was an apothecary's modest shop. Entering by the shop door, which stood open, I confronted a man, who, with his coat off and his shirtsleeves tucked up, was arranging bottles, and handed him my letter. It never entered my head for a moment that he could be the curator, and when he suddenly tore open the letter and began to read it I was very much surprised. "No! No!" I cried, waving my hands and using the few words of Russian I could muster. "The letter is for the curator of the Museum, not for you. Please give it back to me and tell me where to find him." But he held the letter fast, and pointing to himself and laughing as though he thought it a very good joke, he finally made me understand that he was the curator of the Museum we had come so far to see. Not a word of anything but Russian could he speak, but by signs and gesticulations we managed to understand each other. Then I



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sat down in his little sitting-room while he sent for some one to interpret. Presently the assistant curator arrived. He was an exiled Pole, who had spent ten years of his life in a hard labour prison. He had had a university training in his youth, spoke French and German, and was a most interesting man to talk to. "I shall be very pleased to come with you to the Museum and interpret for M. Martianof," he said kindly, and I was only too glad to accept his offer. M. Martianof had an interesting face and most intelligent eyes. I was anxious to converse with him as well as to see the results of his patient labour. We arranged to meet at the Museum at an early hour the next morning.

Nicolas Mikhailovitch Martianof is both botanist and apothecary by profession. He settled in Minusinsk in 1877, some say as an exile, and began at once to collect botanical specimens. He soon found it impossible however to confine his attention to botany in a neighbourhood rich indeed in its flora, but richer still—with untold wealth—in those



## MINUSINSK

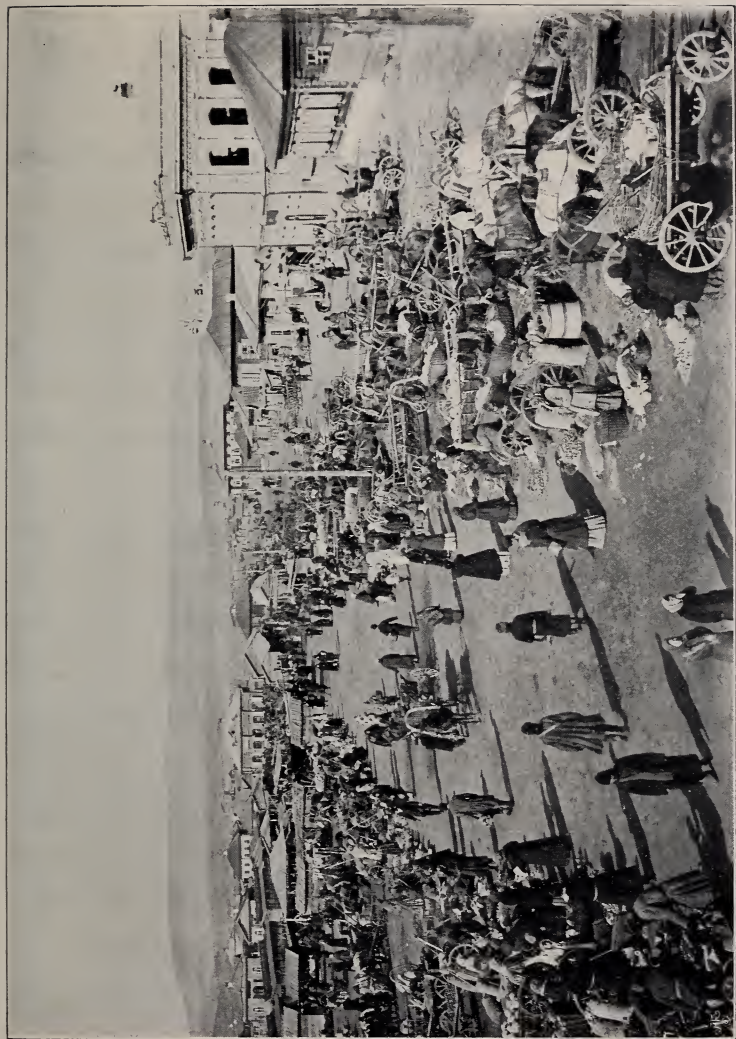
treasures which delight the heart of the mineralogist, the archæologist, and last but not least the anthropologist. Bit by bit he gathered interesting collections around him, and so it was thus that the Museum came into existence. For twenty-five years it has been steadily growing, and today it is, of local museums, perhaps the most interesting in the world.

The present town of Minusinsk is simply an overgrown Siberian village. Most of the houses are in a state of great dilapidation. The grey wood of which they are so roughly put together looks painfully rotten, and large families live in dwellings which, to an outsider, seem to have no roof at all; how they keep warm in winter I cannot imagine. Our inn was in the chief street, which strangely resembled a farmyard. Cocks and hens strutted about in front of our windows. Yet there were stone houses and even shops to be found here and there, if one only knew where to look for them. So much for the Minusinsk of to day. The land, however, has a history. It is now an accepted fact that

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as far back as the year 2,000 B.C. the country round was peopled by a wealthy and prosperous race of white men, who came originally from India, and are alluded to in the ancient annals of the Chinese. Later on, when these had either died out or been driven away by more powerful neighbours, other races flourished in turn on the same ground. Through the wonderful discoveries that are continually being made, the story of each distinctive race is coming to light, and a lost chapter is thus being added to the earth's written history.

With the enthusiasm of a boy M. Martianof took us from case to case and from room to room. He would allow nothing to be looked at out of its turn; there was a regular order in which everything had to be seen. The cases were greatly in want of repair, and, considering the value of their contents, it seemed incongruous when the curator opened them by sticking the end of a lucifer match into their broken locks. Where a lid would not keep shut of itself a bit of old newspaper was jammed in. All the questions we cared to ask were patiently



Market place at Minusinsk.





Masks found near Minusinsk.





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answered through our kind interpreter. There was a touching modesty about these two men; self was utterly forgotten. Their whole soul was in the treasures they were displaying.

Beginning with mineralogy we saw specimens of precious metals, marbles, and stones brought from the neighbouring mountains, including the model of a nugget of gold weighing seventy-two pounds. Then our attention was directed to a collection of stones, the surfaces of which had been polished by exposure to mountain blasts during a long succession of centuries; and from these we passed to others on which water had had a similar effect. Next came a fine assortment of fossils. "The chalk of these fossils," said M. Martianof, pointing to one particular kind, "is used in South China for medicinal purposes." We now passed on to a collection of local birds, each with a nest full of eggs at its side. Here we recognized many of our feathered friends, including the domesticated pigeon, a bird common to nearly every part of Siberia. The pigeon is looked upon by Russians as an emblem of the Holy Spirit, and is therefore

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sacred. An Indian pheasant was also pointed out to us, and a grouse that had made its way from Mongolia. Interesting specimens of asbestos, or "mountain leather," as our interpreter called it, next attracted our attention. Several rooms were devoted to the art of farming, and agriculture in general. There were all kinds of fascinating fungi illustrating the diseases of trees. I remember one species which spreads itself out like a thin skin under the bark and slowly but surely sucks away the life of gigantic trees that might have flourished on for ages but for this fell enemy. Our eyes had rested on the summit of many a forest-clad mountain as we glided up the wide Yenisei, and now we turned with special interest to that section of the Museum which contained specimens of the wild animals that roam these still little explored regions. There were the bear, the fox, the sable, the ermine, the musk-deer, the lynx, and many another; but suffice it to say that the abundance of costly furs to be obtained from these wilds has already attracted the attention of traders. Some of the finest and rarest skins

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displayed in Regent Street have been brought from the mountains of Minusinsk.

In another department we were shown plaster masks of great antiquity, which had been found in recently discovered graves. The masks had been taken after death. Several are in a state of perfect preservation. We did not see all of them, for archæologists had already transferred a number of them to the museums of St. Petersburg.

“It is true they have taken away some of my most valuable treasures,” explained M. Martianof, but the collection is still complete in a way, for exact models of all the things taken have been left me. Here you see is a copy of a massive gold bracelet found in one of the tombs; the real bracelet could not be left here without risk; the same with the lump of gold, the cast of which you saw just now.”

We passed through rooms in which were displayed countless arrowheads and other relics belonging to the ages of Stone and Ice; but we did not linger here, for we knew it was the age of Bronze that had furnished the Museum with its

## A RIBBON OF IRON

richest trophies. The first of the rooms devoted to the Bronze period contained no less than 4,000 bronze knives. Here there were numerous shelves on which were displayed handsomely worked vases, cups, helmets, horses' bits, mirrors, and suchlike. Speaking of mirrors, I bought an ancient mirror at Nikko in Japan two months later, which is not at all unlike those that have been dug up in the Minusinsk district. "The people who inhabited the country during the age of Bronze are supposed to have been of Finnish origin," said the Curator. "The presence of so many knives and helmets is an indication of their warlike temperament. They spread themselves over a wide area, and must have been a wealthy and a powerful race. I am convinced that the collection you see here is nothing to the one we shall have in time if we persevere."

The Curator's enthusiasm was infectious. One longed to go out into the fields and, with one's own hands, dig up another delicate vase or another carved knife all green with age; but, once carried away from the spot to which



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it belonged, a treasure of this sort would, to my mind, be bereft of half its interest. Do the treasures of the Parthenon displayed in the British Museum charm us like those we look up to from the heights of the Acropolis?

Facing the chief staircase are glass cases containing two hundred skulls, every one of great value, dating back to prehistoric times. The Assistant Curator, M. Felix Cohn, is at present engaged in writing a book on this unique collection. Taking several of them from the shelves he explained to us wherein lay the distinguishing marks between these skulls and those belonging to a later date. Professor Virchow, of Vienna, has one or two like them in his collection, but very few if any are to be met with elsewhere. So far I have only mentioned the contents of the room on the ground floor. Having mounted the staircase we were confronted by startling apparitions—life-sized models of men and women from the various tribes of the district. Each figure was attired in brightly coloured native dress.

Passing through to another section we found

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several rooms fitted up with bookshelves, and packed to the ceiling with books of every description and language, from Chinese works on art to volumes of our own Tennyson and Browning. Noticing our astonishment at the sight of these latter, the Curator explained that they had been sent him by the few English and American travellers who had visited Minusinsk.

Professor F. R. Martin, a French archæologist, visited Minusinsk in 1891. He had planned to stay one week, but the attractions of the Museum proved too strong, and he remained a much longer time, took away many photographs of the bronzes, and has since published them in an album, a copy of which is now in the Museum. This gentleman could not speak highly enough of M. Martianof's collection.

To Englishmen Minusinsk is scarcely known at all, or only as a land rich in the gold mines of the future. M. Martianof told us that we were the first Englishwomen to whom he had shown his Museum, "but they will come in time," he added with a prophetic smile.

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Before leaving Minusinsk we made the acquaintance of a highly educated Polish exile, Count Richeski, to whom we had brought an introduction. He spoke English fluently. Much of his time is devoted to astronomy. He has a telescope of his own, and is a member of the "Société Astronomique de France," to which he has contributed valuable observations on the fissures in the moon. He told us that on account of the purity of the atmosphere during the winter months he had had exceptional opportunities for studying the moon's surface. Selenologists have been much interested in these observations. From Count Richeski we learned that in winter the thermometer often stands for several days in succession at  $43^{\circ}$  Réaumur, whilst  $30^{\circ}$  for six weeks together is not at all an uncommon occurrence.

## Chapter VIII

### EMIGRANTS—LADY DOCTORS— KRASNOIARSK AGAIN

**E**MIGRANTS meet you at every turn on the Siberian railway and on the river steamers. Indeed I might almost say that we had them with us wherever we went. Russians are emigrating at the rate of 200,000 a year, and Minusinsk is one of the districts to which they are being sent in shoals. In cold weather we used to see them lying in “heaps” at the railway stations, sleeping away the time and keeping one another warm. When there was nothing better to do we amused ourselves by trying to guess to whom that pair of legs belonged, or whether this head belonged to a man or a woman. Wrapped in their winter sheepskins, to lessen their baggage, they would

## EMIGRANTS

sleep sweetly while the powerful midsummer sun poured down upon their upturned faces.

Yet these poor creatures are by no means uncared for. To begin with, when, of their own free will, they make up their minds to emigrate, the Government allows them to send delegates ahead to inspect the land that is to be their new home. When these men return a final decision is made. On the frontier, at Cheliabinsk, all their passports are carefully examined before they are allowed to proceed. Whenever they have to wait more than a certain number of hours temporary shelters are provided. Those at Omsk are huts such as the Kirgiz live in. I was greatly mystified at first to see Russians going in and out of such dwellings.

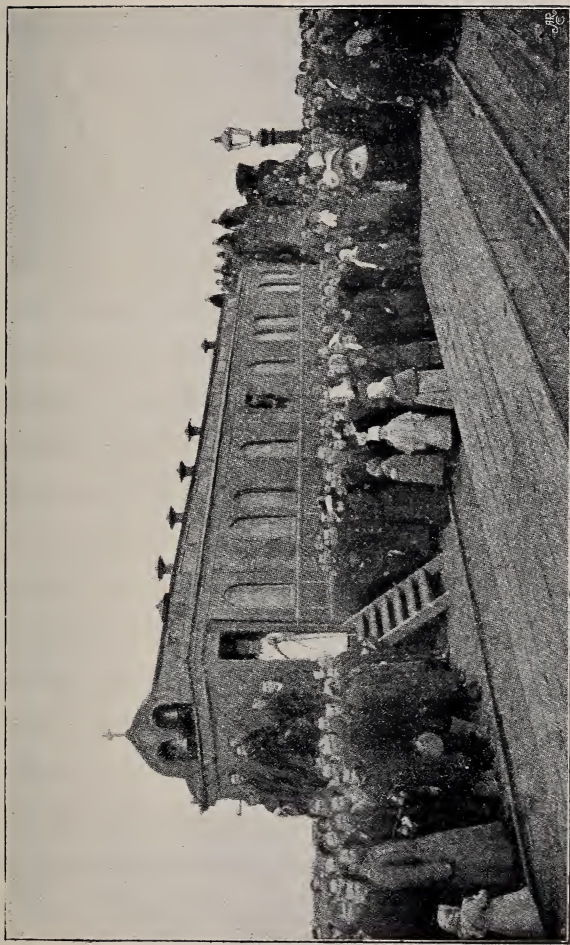
Returning from Minusinsk to Krasnoiarsk we had for our companion on the steamer a young medical lady who had just accompanied a batch of emigrants from Moscow to Minusinsk. She had with her a large wicker basket in which she carried medicines, bandages and other articles that might be wanted. Her duties con-



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sisted in going a round of inspection every day. On the steamer she had to see that the babies got proper food, taste their milk, and see that they were fed with white bread, the ordinary black bread being too coarse for very young children. On one of her rounds she had discovered that a man was developing typhus. It had then been her duty to have him landed at the nearest spot to a hospital, and give him over herself to the care of the nurses. She expected to spend the following summer months in attending various batches on their journeys from Krasnoiarsk to Minusinsk. Another lady doctor was stationed in Krasnoiarsk to attend to the welfare of emigrants halting there.

The Government allows each man a certain amount of land, and this he is free to cultivate for ten years free of taxes. After that he becomes a regular citizen and pays his taxes like the rest. If he is very poor to start with, he may borrow thirty roubles, or some such sum, from the local official who has charge of Government money for that purpose. This he pays



Church Railway Carriage.



## EMIGRANTS

back by instalments as his worldly goods increase. There are some families who do not take kindly to the new life; they pack up their bundles once more and return to Russia. I wondered at first how it was that so many seemed to be travelling the wrong way. "Those are people who have changed their minds," I was told; "they are going home again." Now that they can travel by rail perhaps there are some who take the return trip for mere pleasure. Who knows? The carriages in which they travel are suited specially to these long journeys. Wooden flaps are arranged to form upper berths, and these they cover with their own bedding. So comfortable do they make themselves that they sleep the greater part of the way, and only wake for meals. Making my way through the central corridor of one of these carriages I felt as if I were walking between great cupboards, the shelves of which were packed with grimy humanity.

As for the souls of the emigrants, their welfare is also looked after by the Government. A church-railway carriage is hooked on to the end

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of the train when required, and a long-haired priest officiates. The church being very small the air soon becomes vitiated from the presence of such dirty people; none but an emigrant could stand it.

Great care is taken that those who have been neighbours in the old country shall continue to be neighbours in the new, and fresh arrivals are not allowed to interfere with those who were there before them.

At Omsk we made the acquaintance of a gentleman who is styled "Head of the Peasants." His business is to arrange with foreign markets for the purchase of their salt butter, corn and other agricultural produce. A large amount of the butter consumed by our London poor is made by Siberian peasants.

We found it a difficult matter to get away from Minusinsk, not because of the attractions of the place, but on account of the irregularity of the steamers. Hearing that one was due at five in the afternoon, and that after only an hour's delay it would start immediately for Krasnoiarsk, we drove down to the bank—there



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is nothing that can be called a wharf except a barge moored to the side—and, having dismissed our droshky, sat on some rough planks to await our steamer. It never came. After several hours had passed and the evening was getting dark and chilly, a peasant woman came and persuaded us to go back to the inn for the night. She managed to convey her meaning by shutting her eyes and leaning her head on her hand. The people who had seen us leave the inn smiled knowingly as they saw us return. Their faces seemed to say, "I told you so." This was very aggravating, but worse was still to come. The innkeeper came out to meet us just as calmly as if we had been new comers. He showed us, by pointing to the clock, that the steamer would start at five o'clock the next morning. We did not pay our droshky man, lest he should forget to call for us in good time. Lying down in our clothes, we spent a restless night and were thankful to hear the whistle of a steamer soon after daybreak. "There she is," I cried, and in another minute the droshky man was thumping at our door. I went out into

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the passage. The innkeeper lay there snoring, and did not seem inclined to wake. I roused him, however, and paid our bill. Then once more he and his wife bade us adieu. This time I said *dosvi danie*<sup>1</sup> very politely, and gave the woman a larger tip, for I had a presentiment that we should meet again.

There lay the steamer; but how much smaller she looked than the one by which we had come! We began to have misgivings; but when we said "Krasnoiarsk?" in a questioning tone, to the men on the bank, they smiled and nodded. Thinking all was right, we told the droshky man to take our things on board. All at once the people shook their heads and tried to stop us. "Krasnoiarsk?" we said again, and again they nodded, but they would not let us go on board. As the steamer now showed signs of starting I grew desperate, and seizing my umbrella drew a line on the sand, and making a mark for Minusinsk and another for Krasnoiarsk, showed them where we wanted to go. Then an old peasant took the umbrella from my hand and

<sup>1</sup> Russian for *au revoir*.

## EMIGRANTS

added a branch line to my sand picture. At the end of the branch line he put a mark, pronouncing at the same time the name of a place I had never heard of. Then he turned and pointed to the steamer. At last we understood. The steamer's name was *Krasnoiarsk*, but she was bound for quite a different place, a village on the Abakan! This time we felt painfully self-conscious as we drove back to the inn.

The following evening, at five o'clock, our steamer came at last. We went on board at once, but she did not start till five the following morning, thirty-six hours after the appointed time.

The name of this steamer was *Scotia*. She was originally a sea-going pleasure yacht, built in Scotland, but we found her a dirty, second-rate passenger boat. Still she was a tough little ship, for she was one of the two that braved the Kara sea and made their way from England to Krasnoiarsk. It rained a good deal going back, but we borrowed mackintoshes, and sat on deck most of the time. At one of the

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stopping places a pig ran swiftly down the bank and began swimming towards us ; every one laughed to see its business-like air. Suddenly, when close to the steamer, after taking a good look at us all, it turned round and swam back to the bank as fast as it had come.

“ Ah ! ” said a peasant who was leaning over the side, “ he only travels first class ! ” (There were no first cabins on the *Scotia*, all were marked “ second. ”)

What a nice change it was to get back to Krasnoiarsk and have eatable food once more ! At Minusinsk there had been so little one could eat. The eggs were peculiar, bread, milk, and cream were sour, while a strange taste in the water spoiled the flavour of the tea we had brought from England.

At Krasnoiarsk we wrote our letters, and I took them to the post-office to be registered. The man insisted that the addresses must be in Russian, and as the only name I had learned to write in Russian characters was my own, I was obliged to register them to myself. The plan succeeded, and I can recommend it to



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others who may find themselves in a similar difficulty. If you do not register in Siberia, there is every chance that the stamps will be taken off and the letter destroyed long before it reaches the border. You cannot register after 2 p.m., in which case it is advisable to use a black-edged envelope. Superstition will then prevent its being tampered with.

"Do you see that white house standing in its own grounds?" said a friend just before we started for Irkutsk.

"Yes," I replied, looking in the direction indicated.

"That house contains the best library of which Siberia can boast," was the reply. "It is the private collection of Génade Basilivitch," continued our friend. "It contains a copy of every book that has been written on the country." We were sorry not to have an opportunity of seeing such a collection of books; but, after all, we should not have gained much by looking at their covers.

It was at Krasnoiarsk that we were enter-



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tained with stories of an adventurous American who undertook, about three years ago, to cross Siberia on foot. He accomplished the feat in two years, and is now in the States, where he publishes occasional articles on his journey. In one house on the route, where he was hospitably received, he obtained some large screws, and, screwing them into the soles of his boots, proceeded to try them on his hostess' parquet floor, much to that lady's consternation. Our pedestrian carried all his luggage himself. It included a frock coat. He wore a hat which was telescopic, and could be used as an umbrella if required. A gentleman who saw him when he had accomplished about half his journey told me that his hair had become so bleached and so coarse that it was more like sheep's wool than human hair.

## Chapter IX

### SCENERY AFTER KRASNOIARSK. IRKUTSK

A FEW minutes after leaving Krasnoiarsk station our train crossed the wonderful Yenisei bridge. We found it much narrower than it had appeared as we glided beneath it in the steamer. There is only one line of rails, and barely room for a foot-passenger to stand on either side as the train passes over. We were surprised to find several men and some women and children calmly gazing up at us, squeezing themselves into as little space as possible against the sides. Such a thing would hardly be feasible if the train moved at a greater speed.

After we had crossed over we took a sharp turn to the left and kept close to the river for a short distance. We now had a fine view

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of the town across the water. Very soon it had disappeared, and in its place was lovely scenery, not at all unlike that of some of the Harz mountains. Grass-clad hills rose one after another before our eyes. They were like the peaks that wind sometimes forms on sand hills, only higher. Their fresh green slopes seemed to melt before our eyes and spread themselves into verdant meadows. These meadows soon appeared to reflect the blue sky above them, for they were carpeted with forget-me-nots. Then we passed a clear stream such as the forget-me-nots had led us to expect, and a horse that was drinking the water as it gurgled over the stones, fled at a gallop as the train approached. How little our friends at home could dream that we were enjoying this beautiful and home-like scene so far away in the heart of Siberia! Soon the forget-me-nots were out of sight and the meadows shone a fiery orange red, for such was the effect of the ranunculus in the afternoon sunlight.

We leaned our heads out of the carriage windows that we might listen to the larks

## SCENERY AFTER KRASNOIARSK

singing in the clouds above us and watch the setting sun as it flashed golden beams through the dark fir-trees. The ground now became more cultivated; it was like a piece of coloured patchwork, bright yellow where it was covered with the stubble of last year's corn, green where fresh grass was growing, and black as ink where the peasants had recently turned up the rich dark earth. That earth, as agriculturists would tell you, is of more value to Siberia than all her mines of gold.

Presently we passed hills entirely covered with trees; the white-stemmed birch mingled its pale-green foliage with that of the gloomy larch, whose ruddy bark shone like copper in the evening sun. A group of men at work on the line stood still to watch us pass. Their cotton blouses represented all the colours of the rainbow; or, if any one tint was absent, we certainly saw it too, a little later, when we passed a village all in grey, and espied—the only colour in the picture—a line of gay blouses hanging out to dry. The effect of these bright colours was unique.

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Now came hills and vales covered with park-like sward, soft as the grass of an English lawn. An old English mansion would not have seemed out of place here, in spite of the fact that no oak, elm, or copper beech was visible. Here and there we saw a slender fence of white birch gleaming like silver filigree between the trees, or a skeleton birch stripped of its leaves and lying like a branch of white coral on the rich sward. And all the time our engine panted slowly on like some huge animal labouring for its breath. When nearing a station it would give, in place of our ordinary train whistle, the scream of a steamer approaching land. Night closed in at last, and when we looked out the next morning we found that the scenery had changed again. The hills had quite disappeared, and forests of pine surrounded us on all sides.

The heat had become intense. We lay still with closed eyes for several hours, too exhausted to stir. Towards the close of the day it grew deliciously cool, and a refreshing breeze blew into our carriage windows with such



## SCENERY AFTER KRASNOIARSK

violence that it knocked over a bottle of milk and carried off a sheet of paper on which I was making notes.

We now came to a scene of desolation, a forest of dead and leafless trees standing gaunt and stiff like sentinels burnt to death at the post of duty. This pitiful sight continued for several miles. The cruel fire that had been the cause of all this destruction must have done the mischief some time back, for here and there an undergrowth had begun to spring up round the cracked and charred poles; they were trees no longer; their very branches were gone.

Further on we saw the fire at its fiendish work. Blue smoke curled through the forest to our right, and a strong smell of burning permeated the air. Blackened trunks lay smouldering on the ground, and now and again the stump of what must have been once a king of the forest was blazing and crackling like a log fire.

It was early on Whit-Sunday morning, by Russian reckoning, when the train steamed into

## A RIBBON OF IRON

Irkutsk—or rather smoked in—for its funnel sent forth volumes of black smoke.

The hotel in which we stayed was called the *Métropole*. We had been advised to go there rather than to any other “because it is the cleanest.” We noticed throughout our tour that people comparing the respective merits of Siberian hotels invariably designated the different establishments as “clean,” “cleaner,” or “cleanest,” unless indeed they were obliged to use the words “dirty,” “dirtier,” “dirtiest.”

There were some fair-sized rooms in the *Métropole*, and sheets and pillows could be had for the beds by paying extra for them, but the service had better be passed by in silence. There was a “commissioner” attached to the hotel who understood German; but he was invariably out, or asleep in bed when we wanted him to interpret. When surrounded by six gaping waiters I asked for a spoon they brought me a glass of vodka!

Our bedroom had windows on two sides and a sort of turret in one corner with windows all round it like a lantern. It opened with folding doors into a large sitting-room with a

## SCENERY AFTER KRASNOIARSK

balcony. For the two rooms we were asked six roubles<sup>1</sup> a day. Food we paid for separately, and ordered *à la carte*.

Irkutsk was enjoying a lovely April day when we saw its streets for the first time. Taking a stroll through the town we gazed with delight on the Siberian crab trees, whose branches were covered with snowy blossom. These trees seemed to be in every garden and at every street corner.

As it was Whit-Sunday, and church time, men and women, dressed in their best, were hurrying to church with branches of apple-blossom in their hands. Bright green grass, wet with the night's rain, flourished in the less trodden parts of the unpaved streets. We looked at the windows of the houses as we went along and saw that the spaces between the double panes of glass were still packed with cotton wool. On top of the cotton wool blossoms of everlasting flowers had been laid as decoration. They had lain there the whole long winter, and that winter was hardly over yet, while with us it was the 10th of June.

<sup>1</sup> A rouble is equal to 2s. 1d.

## A RIBBON OF IRON

Irkutsk, as we find it today, is one of the most Russianized towns of Siberia, and therefore one of the least interesting to the superficial traveller. He who looks more deeply sees that the town is passing through a crucial point in its existence and that it must be considered with regard both to what it was a short time ago and what it will be in the near future. Today, with all its handsome stone churches, its public buildings, its schools and its shops, it has not a single paved street; it has neither water works nor electric light. Yet these blessings of civilization are not far off. A scheme for their introduction, involving an outlay of some three and a half million roubles, has already been set on foot.

The Great Siberian Railway has done wonders for Irkutsk. Its inhabitants no longer feel themselves isolated from the rest of the world. A pleasant journey of nine days now brings them to Moscow without the ordinary fatigue of travelling. They have simply to get in and out of their moving hotel.

The chief gold melting establishment in



## SCENERY AFTER KRASNOIARSK

Siberia is here. Gold is received straight from the mines, melted and weighed. According to its weight cash is paid down in roubles to those who have brought it. The surrounding neighbourhood is rich in silver and copper ore, which only await enterprise and capital. Coal mines are already being worked, and their owners have lately made a contract with the Government to supply so many tons of coal regularly for the railway. At present a great deal of wood is used.

More than two hundred thousand roubles were spent in building the theatre. It is a handsome edifice entirely of stone. Some years ago, when the churches were almost the only stone buildings in existence, a terrible fire broke out and destroyed half the town. Such a disaster could not now occur in Irkutsk, as the chief streets contain only a small proportion of wooden houses, and a law has been passed that no more are to be built there.

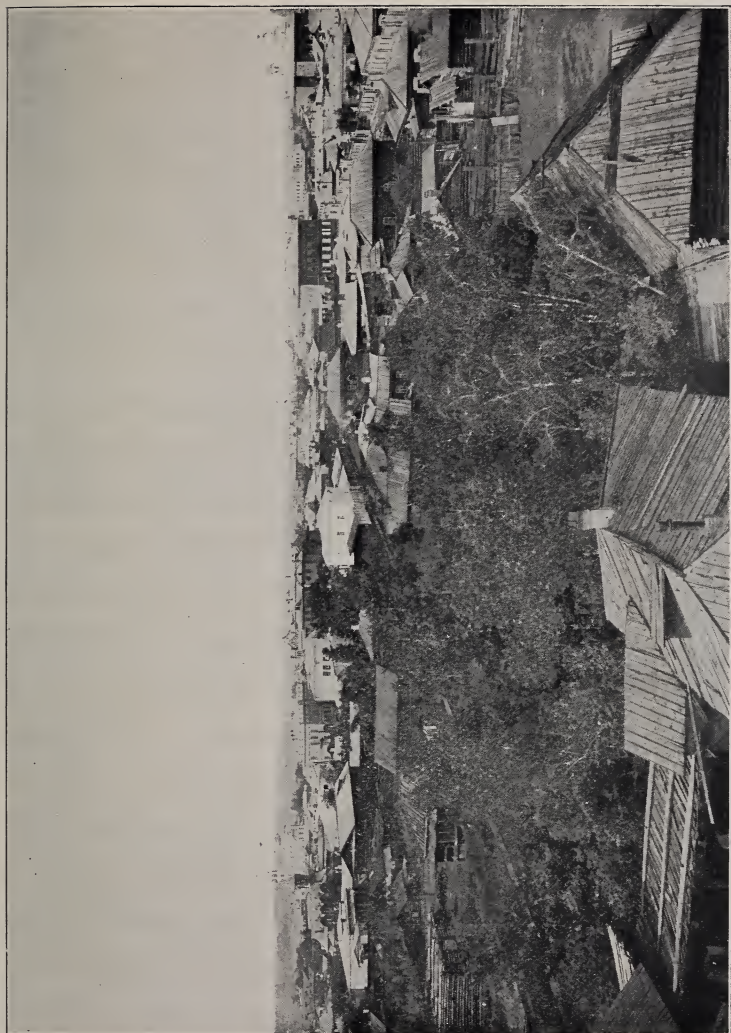
A similar disaster did however occur in Tomsk only a few days after we had left it. This we learned from the Irkutsk journal



## A RIBBON OF IRON

which a friend translated to us. The fire broke out at eleven o'clock in the morning and the wind carried sparks from one house to another till several streets were in flames. While all the firemen were using their efforts to stop the flames from spreading, and to save the women and children, signals were made to them that another part of the town was also burning; but they had their work cut out for them where they were, and concluded that the signals referred to the quarter in which they were already engaged, so they went on with their heroic task, holding back frantic mothers as they tried to dash into the flames to save their children, and stopping those who, crazy with fear, were spreading the fire in attempts to rescue their burning furniture. Thus whole streets were left to their fate. When at last the fire was extinguished it was found that six entire streets had been destroyed. It is estimated that about seven hundred thousand roubles worth of property was reduced to cinders in a few hours.

Irkutsk spreads over a great deal of ground.



Irkutsk.



## SCENERY AFTER KRASNOIARSK

The station is about two miles from the centre of the town, and you have to pass over the Angara. As you cross the bridge a toll of eight kopeks is demanded for each carriage.

The beautiful river Angara will, in times to come, be an additional source of wealth. At present nothing is being done to make it more navigable, but thousands of roubles have been spent in fruitless attempts to clear away the stones in its bed which obstruct the passage of large vessels. Tea merchants have been especially interested in these efforts, knowing well that if they could only bring their tea straight from China by means of the river, they would be able to make their millions. Besides being more rapid in its flow than any other river in Siberia, the Angara has the purest water. It can safely be drunk without boiling, and is so clear that, looking down into it from the bridge, you can see the bottom as distinctly as if there were no water there.

As soon as the railway was brought to Irkutsk, half the inhabitants were thrown out of work, for they had hitherto gained their

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livelihood by the transport of travellers. They are now slowly beginning to turn their energies in the direction of agriculture, but the crisis can hardly be said to be over.

A few capitalists have so far had everything their own way, for in a new country, poor men, however energetic they may be, can do nothing without capital. "Millionaires," as they are called, of forty thousand roubles or thereabout, live in the utmost simplicity far out in the country. They have travelled and seen something of the world, and now an occasional visit to Irkutsk is all the change they require. Anyone who had not heard of their comparative wealth would take them for well-to-do farmers.

Prices are very high ; ground rent is simply enormous considering it is Siberia. The oats used to feed the horses are very dear ; consequently a drive in a droshky costs double the amount one is accustomed to pay in St. Petersburg. Hotels, too, are expensive considering the lack of comfort.

The schools are large and well managed ; their teachers are from Russia. French and German



## SCENERY AFTER KRASNOIARSK

are taught, but English has not yet penetrated so far. Those who have learned it elsewhere have forgotten the little they knew for want of opportunity to practise it. Many Siberians bring their children to town for the winter and return to their country houses when the summer holidays begin.

Here, as elsewhere, a strict line is drawn between those who are and those who are not "in society," but there is, notwithstanding, a kindly feeling between the classes, and a *Gemüthlichkeit* that other spots on this earth might do well to imitate. Taking all in all, Irkutsk has its favourable points ; and there is certainly "a good time coming."

## Chapter X

### A MODEL CONVICT SETTLEMENT

Il n'y a ni mauvaises herbes ni mauvais hommes ; il n'y a que de mauvais cultivateurs.

VICTOR HUGO.

ON Friday morning we started on our first journey by tarantass. The Governor of Irkutsk had kindly provided us with a letter to the Director of the hard labour prisons at Alexandrovsk, and we were impatient to make use of it.

Alexandrovsk is situated about fifty miles north-west of Irkutsk and a little more than a hundred miles from the Chinese frontier. As the road is not good and the hills are steep one has to allow at least seven hours for the journey and change horses three times on the way. Fresh horses often have to be fetched from the fields, and there are only dilapidated and dirty post houses to rest in, which swarm

## A MODEL CONVICT SETTLEMENT

in hot weather with the most unpleasant of insects. Nothing but hot water can be got at these places, not even a glass of milk or an egg, though cows and poultry roam at large in the village streets. The men who come out to change your horses look like veritable ruffians; their clothes are ragged and dirty, while their hair hangs over their eyes like matted tow; yet for all their wild appearance they are duly appointed servants of the State, and may be trusted even by ladies travelling alone as we were.

“I cannot promise you an elegant conveyance,” said a Russian officer who kindly acted as our interpreter when we were ordering a vehicle, and indeed it was simply a mudbespattered cart with a wooden hood at one end, like a huge barrel. It had no springs and no seats, except that of the driver; the bottom was covered with straw, and upon this we placed large pillows taken from our beds at the hotel.

The jolting of a tarantass is something that must be experienced in order to be understood; the first hour or so of it brings you to the conclusion that you will be a mass of bruises

## A RIBBON OF IRON

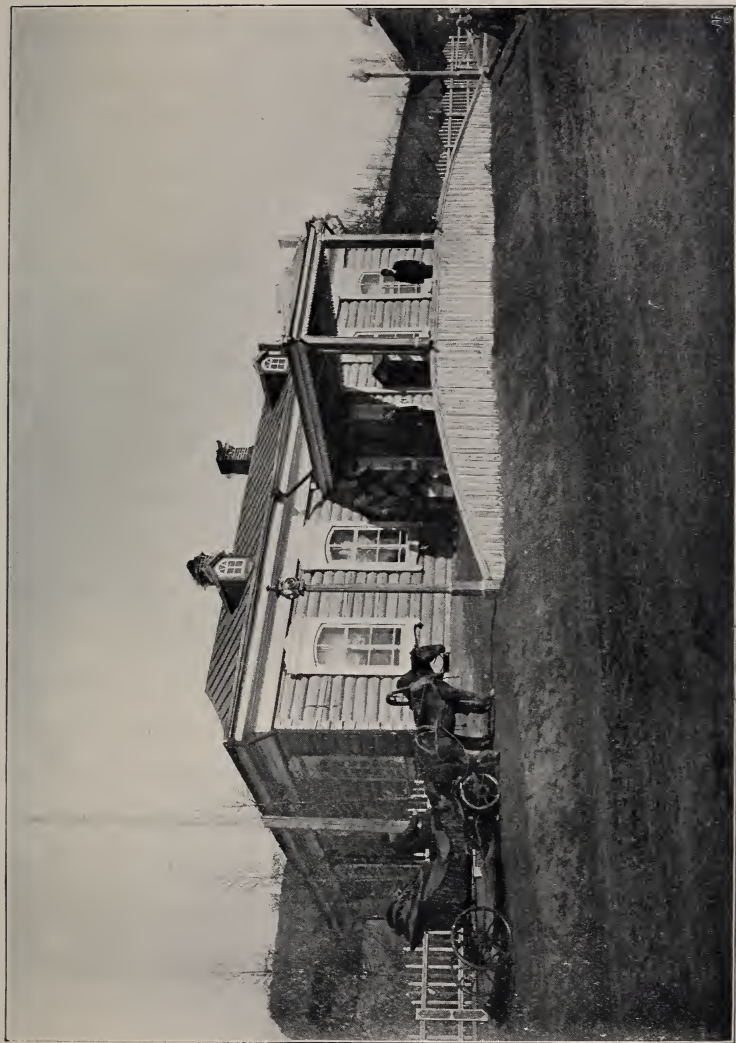
by night time. But there is an art in tarantass travelling as there is in everything else. Officers who have constantly to make long journeys in them say that you should sit with your heels drawn up under you, and your chin resting on your knees. This brings you into the position in which the spine is least affected by the motion.

It was quite dark before we reached Alexandrovsk, but there was a cheerful look about the chief street as we drove through it, for bright lights shone from many a window, and gave one the impression that there was comfort within.

At last we stopped at the door of the visitors' house, as it is called. There is no hotel in the place, for none go to Alexandrovsk except to visit the prison like ourselves, or to transact business with its Director. A man came out and asked if we had brought a letter of introduction; then, seeing one in my hand, he at once offered to help us out of the tarantass. We were shown into a sparsely furnished, but beautifully clean, guestchamber, and our wraps, which were full of straw, were carried away to be shaken.

Not wishing to lose any time, we sent the





House for Visitors, Alexandrovsk.





## A MODEL CONVICT SETTLEMENT

letter at once to the gentleman to whom it was addressed. Hardly ten minutes had elapsed when we were told that the Director was waiting to speak to us in the next room.

As we entered two gentlemen came forward to welcome us with a kindly greeting that was quite refreshing after our long and solitary drive. We knew at once which was the Director; he was an elderly man of marked personality. His grey hair was long like that of a musician. He had the face of a Sarasate, but his dress was military, and a row of medals adorned his breast. When he spoke he had a queer little way of putting his head close to yours and peering into your face with his twinkling eyes, as though he wished to read your thoughts rather than listen to your words. At first I attributed this to a desire to surmount the difficulty of having no common language in which we could converse, but I noticed later on that he behaved in the same way with every one he spoke to, even the criminals in the prison. His companion had come to see if he could help us understand one another, but we

## A RIBBON OF IRON

found that though he had learned German at school he could neither understand nor speak it.

The Director brought out a book containing the names of all the people who had visited the prison for the last ten or twelve years ; there was not a woman's name among them, so it was no wonder if our visit caused some interest. I do not think there were thirty names in all, and only four or five were English.

While we were talking supper was brought in, and we were pressed to eat. Our host kept up an animated conversation all the time ; I cannot call it a fluent one, for every word had to be repeated many times, and illustrated by action before we could get to an understanding.

When the man who was waiting on us had left the room the Director told us that he and all the other servants were convicts.

"They will take every care of you during your stay here," he continued, "and do all in their power to make you comfortable. You are perfectly safe in their hands."

He then went on to explain that the villagers of Alexandrovsk were all people who had, for

## A MODEL CONVICT SETTLEMENT

some crime or other, been condemned to penal servitude. After passing the allotted number of years in close confinement they had been allowed to settle down in homes of their own with their wives and children, still under the eyes of the Director though outside the prison walls.

Just then a man who had been sent for by the Director entered the room.

"Here is one of them," he added; "he is a German, and can interpret for us." Then turning to the man he bade him tell us about himself and his work. He was quite young, and would have been good-looking but for his very prominent ears; his eyes were bright, almost unnaturally so, and there was something pathetic in the expression of his face. It was the face of one whose spirit had been broken, but not crushed.

"I am a criminal," he said simply, "just like those you will see in the prison tomorrow. My conduct pleased the Director, so he let me out before my time. I may not leave Alexandrovsk, but the restraint placed upon me is now only a moral one. There are many

## A RIBBON OF IRON

like myself ; the Director trusts us implicitly. We all have our own handicraft ; I am an upholsterer. For a certain number of hours each day we work for the Government, the rest of our time is our own to earn what we can. The regulation of our compulsory work is in the hands of the Director ; if he is pleased with us, he gives us less to do ; but if he is dissatisfied, he gives us more. I have my wife and children with me, and in a few weeks' time I am to receive my papers from Russia. I shall then be a free man, but I shall not go back to Russia. I have made my home here now."

"The room we are now in," said the Director, when the convict had finished his story, "is used as a concert hall for the prisoners, and now and then we have theatricals. You see there is a raised platform at one end."

Then he took us into another room and showed us a plan of part of the Siberian railway. "Our prisoners laid all the rails from Malta to Telma," he said proudly, "a distance of thirty-six versts. The prisoners are from Russia and Poland," he continued. "Including the four



## A MODEL CONVICT SETTLEMENT

hundred who live in the village we can take a hundred thousand. At present there are six hundred and fifty in the prison itself, besides those employed outside."

We asked why this distant spot had been chosen for the settlement.

"For reasons of economy," was the Director's reply. "It is much easier to provide food out here than near a town; land is much cheaper, and farm produce more easily obtained."

We next asked if there were any political offenders at Alexandrovsk.

"Yes, we have some from the nobility," was the reply, "but you will not be able to distinguish them from the rest, for all are treated exactly alike."

We slept splendidly after our long drive, in spite of the fact that we were surrounded by criminals, and felt ready for anything when the Director came at eight o'clock the next morning to escort us through the prison. He had brought with him the prison doctor, a quiet elderly man who spoke a little French, and the young man who had learned German. The last-mentioned carried a dictionary this time.

## A RIBBON OF IRON

On the way we passed a pretty church built of red brick.

"That church was built by prisoners," said the Director. "You will not find another in Siberia built of red brick."

At this moment a respectably dressed man came up with a paper roll in his hand.

"You said you would like to buy some photographs of Alexandrovsk," said the German convict, who was again acting as interpreter. "This man, a prisoner like myself, is a photographer and an artist by profession. He has brought you some photographs."

On entering the church the Director drew our attention to some mural paintings; one of them, representing Christ rising from the tomb, was particularly well executed. They were all the work of the photographer to whom we had just been speaking. The prison buildings and a spacious courtyard were enclosed by a high brick wall. As we entered the German left us. A prisoner himself, it would not have done for him to accompany us further.

We went into the prison, and visited first the

## A MODEL CONVICT SETTLEMENT

store rooms, in which new clothes for the inmates were arranged in piles. These garments were the work of the prisoners, who supplied wearing apparel not only for the whole of Alexandrovsk, but also for the inmates of all the prisons in the Irkutsk Government. Prison-made boots and shoes were also shown us; even the leather for them had been prepared on the premises.

The rooms opened into wide well lighted corridors, the floors of which were sprinkled with sand. The first was set apart for bread cutting. Here we found men cutting up great loaves into regulation shares. Each worker was allowed three pounds, each non-worker two and a half.

Next we saw the prison shop where prisoners who had any money of their own were allowed to purchase such things as cigars, sausages, milk, potatoes, white bread and sugar. I also saw small looking-glasses for sale.

Then we went to look at the prisoners' beds. Behind each was a recess in the wall which served as a cupboard in which the prisoner

## A RIBBON OF IRON

could keep his things; the bed was made to shut back against the recess in the daytime, and so form the door of the cupboard.

“All the men in this room are Jews,” said the Director, opening another door. “They are not kept together, but we have allowed them to meet today, because this is one of their religious festivals. One of them is an Englishman. He shall come and speak to you.”

The man came at once when called, and the Director waited patiently while we spoke with him in English.

“What part of England do you come from?” we asked.

“I am from Glasgow,” he answered, “but I lived in Whitechapel for some years. Do you know Whitechapel?”

“Yes,” we replied, and then we asked him if he had any friends to whom he would like to send a message.

“No, I don’t want to send any messages,” he replied in rather a sullen tone.

“How long have you been here?” we asked.

“Ten years,” he answered. “I was a soldier



## A MODEL CONVICT SETTLEMENT

in Riga, so I can't return to England ever unless I run away."

"Are you comfortable here?" we asked.

"Yes, fairly," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

"So we are the first Englishwomen you have seen for ten years?"

"Yes," he replied, "you are the first. Please give me a little money. You know we have a shop here at which we can buy things."

We gave him a trifle, and went away much impressed. We had not expected that our first encounter with a fellow countryman would take place under such circumstances as these.

The Director now took us to see the school.

"How do you punish a man if he tries to escape?" I asked on the way.

"He is sent to the Island of Sakhalin,"<sup>1</sup> replied the Director. I asked no more, for I knew that there was hardly a punishment more severe than this. Sakhalin is the furthest point in the Czar's dominions to which a subject can be banished. Its climate is remarkable for its

<sup>1</sup> Not to be confused with the town of this name in Manchuria.



## A RIBBON OF IRON

severity, it is ice-bound during the greater part of the year, and there are seldom as many as fifty days in the whole year that are entirely free from rain or mist. Until the end of the eighteenth century it belonged to China, and it was only in 1875 that the whole island came under Russian sway. Russia is now colonizing it slowly and steadily with transported criminals of the worst character. They are employed in working the coal mines, and in general agriculture under Government supervision. Even here life is not without hope, for a man who has satisfied the authorities by his good conduct for a certain number of years is rewarded with semi-freedom and a little plot of land which he may call his own. Should he wish to marry, there are plenty of female criminals amongst whom he can make his choice, for female convicts from Russia are sent there by steamer from Odessa.

School was being carried on in a cheerful room with two long tables, and benches for the pupils. At one end near the window was a blackboard on a stand. A teacher stood in front of it explaining some simple arithmetical

## A MODEL CONVICT SETTLEMENT

problem to a group of rough men from the lowest peasant class. In another part of the room sat an old man with a white beard. He was poring over a book with large print, but looked up as we entered.

“That old man is learning to read,” said the Director ; “ he is sixty-three.”

We asked if they had a Bible, and one of the pupils was ordered to fetch one. He opened a cupboard in the wall and brought out a large-printed Russian Bible. Round the walls, besides maps, were a series of prints illustrating the horrible fate of drunkards, from a little boy drinking beer, to a man suspended from the gallows. There were also a number of picture books on the table.

“We use this as a reading room as well as a schoolroom,” explained the Director. “Some of the men you see here have simply come to have an hour’s reading ; and that raised desk is used by the teachers when they lecture to a roomful.”

As we were passing out our eyes fell upon an uncouth countryman, who, with a pen in his great clumsy hand, was bending over a child’s copybook. In his younger days, spent in civil-

## A RIBBON OF IRON

ized Europe, he might have ignored the art of writing, but out here—far away in Siberia—he was doing his best to learn.

“You must see our bathrooms,” said the Director, opening another door. “Every man has a bath and clean linen twice a week.”

We went in, and saw a number of large zinc baths with taps for water at the side. Then we proceeded to the courtyard, and crossing it observed that the prison walls were of red brick, while the roofing was painted green. This bright colouring corresponded well with the cheerfulness of the interior.

The bakehouse opened into the courtyard. Here dough had been put into large tubs to rise. The ovens were flat like those of Eastern countries. We tried some bread that had just been baked and found it very good.

Next came the kitchen where soup was being prepared in seven immense boilers; on the table was a framed “menu” tablet showing the fare provided for the day’s dinner. The Director insisted on our tasting the soup, and took some himself. It was made with meat

## A MODEL CONVICT SETTLEMENT

and vegetables and was most palatable. We also tasted a drink called "Kwas," which was also being prepared in large quantities. It is made from bread and is a favourite drink with Russian peasants.

We were now taken to see the prisoners at their work ; carpenters, cabinet makers, bookbinders, tailors, upholsterers, shoemakers, were all busily employed in their respective workshops. Besides these some were engaged in straw work, and others in making cigarettes. There was also a blacksmith's forge where a pair of bellows worked away furiously.

"Now you must come and hear the choir sing," said the Director, and he led us into a large empty room. After we had waited a few minutes the singers came in ; there were eleven of them. They took their stand at the further end of the room and sang, first a church choral, then a serenade, and finally, when we entreated for more, a light piece which they called a polka. The leader stood facing his companions, and kept time with his right hand. Before his prison days he had been a singer by profession,



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and the beautiful music to which we now listened was a result of his careful training. The rich deep voices filled the empty room. It was like listening to the rolling strains of an organ. A tenor took the solo part in the second piece, and sang it with so much taste and feeling that we could hardly find words to express our delight. If only free, those men could have made their fortunes over and over again in England or America; but what were they when we looked at them as the last faint echo of their beautiful singing died away? A row of grey-coated criminals in a Siberian prison!

The Director's own carriage was waiting for us when we came out of the prison gates. "If you will allow me," he said as he handed us in, "I should like to take you to my house for a cup of coffee before we see anything more."

We accepted the invitation with pleasure, so the gentlemen took their seats in another carriage, and we were soon on our way through the village. All the villagers we passed stood still and saluted the Director with the utmost respect. He was like a king amongst them. Yet his home, when we reached it, was surpris-



## A MODEL CONVICT SETTLEMENT

ingly simple and unpretentious. Madame L—— came forward to welcome us on the threshold, and we found that a repast had been especially prepared for us under her direction. It was a very pleasant meal. Talking, it is true, was a difficult matter, but many smiles were exchanged, and by dint of mixing Russian, French, and German all up together we had no dearth of conversation. Later on the Director played us a violin solo, while his daughter accompanied him on the piano; but this was not before he had gallantly escorted me to the piano and insisted on my playing something. As the old man stood there shouldering his violin, and wrapt in his music, he looked far more like a Sarasate than the Director of a convict settlement. What a wonderful power was his, we thought, as we watched him play—the power of ruling by love.

“La force n'est pas dans la force; la force est dans l'amour.”<sup>1</sup>

Under the personal supervision of such a man even the most degraded criminal has the chance

<sup>1</sup> See chapter xv. p. 222.

## A RIBBON OF IRON

of beginning again. Hope is set before him from the outset; he is surrounded by every influence that can raise him, and the implicit trust that is reposed in him brings back his self-respect and helps to start him afresh. If a rebellious spirit does show itself here or there in some hardened breast, it is with his fellows that such a man has to cope, not with the Director. "We will not let you shake the Director's confidence in us," say the others, and thus the rising evil is quickly stopped. Three hundred convicts worked on the railway line outside Irkutsk at the time I have already alluded to, but never a man tried to escape. Had one wished to do so, the others would have prevented him.

When visiting the prisons of Tobolsk, I had noticed that every convict had all the hair shorn from either the left or the right side of his head according to the class of convicts to which he belonged, and as a rule they were heavily chained. At Alexandrovsk, chains are never used and the hair is never shorn; there is nothing to distinguish the prisoner except his

## A MODEL CONVICT SETTLEMENT

prison uniform of grey cloth; and as soon as he leaves the prison to take his place among the villagers even that is abandoned.

After lunch we drove to the schools where the prisoners' children are educated. There were classrooms for boys and girls respectively. In one we found a class of tiny girls standing in a row; they were having a knitting lesson, and worked as fast as their little fingers could go. In another writing was being taught. A little Jewish girl from the Baltic provinces who understood Hebrew was called out to speak to us, but as we did not know that language we chatted with her in German, which she spoke very nicely.

"We have two schools," said the Director: "one has its regular terms and vacations, but the other is always going on. The children of new comers are put into the latter as soon as they arrive; later on they are drafted into the former."

Not far from the schools were a number of miniature workshops, where we saw little boys of ten and twelve being taught the various trades that were to be their life work. It was pretty to see those little fellows so happy over

## A RIBBON OF IRON

their tasks, and their teacher patiently showing the small fingers how to turn a lathe, make a shoe, or bind a book, as the case might be. Each child received careful attention, for there were seldom more than four with one teacher.

The hospital buildings stood apart. We went into two of them, and were pleased to find open fireplaces in the wards with cheerful fires burning. The nurses were all men, convicts like the rest ; they attended the patients attired in long white aprons. There were beds for a hundred and sixty, but only eighty-eight were occupied. Each hospital had its baths, supplied with hot and cold water, and special white bread was baked in the hospital kitchen for those who could not manage prison diet. One hospital was set apart for contagious diseases ; it also had its own kitchen and baths.

The last places we had to visit were a crèche for the young children and the public pleasure grounds. In the crèche we found a bright motherly woman feeding little babies with bread and milk. The mothers were out working in the fields. The Director tasted the food



## A MODEL CONVICT SETTLEMENT

and asked us to do so too, after which we went on to see the gardens. In the centre was a fountain, surrounded by carefully laid out flower beds, and seats for the people were scattered about under the trees. At one end was a tiny chapel such as one so often sees in Russia ; at the other, was a tea house built of light brown wood something like a swiss châlet.

“We have an orchestra,” said the Director. “Sit down under the trees and you shall hear it.”

The band now played a lively tune in the tea house, standing before a large open window. We sat down and pictured the prisoners strolling about amongst the flowers or drinking tea with their wives and children while they listened to the music.

“We must be going now,” said the Director presently, as he looked at his watch. “I have ordered horses for you, and you must start at once if you are to sleep at Irkutsk to night.”

We all returned to the visitors' house together, and a few minutes later the three gentlemen and the convict servants stood on the steps to watch us depart.



## Chapter XI

### TRAVELLING FOURTH CLASS—LAKE BAIKAL CONVICTS

“ONE thing I must tell you,” said a gentleman of Irkutsk as we sat at his hospitable board. “Your difficulties are only just beginning.”

“We heard that in Moscow,” I replied, laughing, “and it has been repeated to us in every town on our way.”

“It is all very well thus far,” continued our friend, shaking his head, “but now you will have to travel fourth class. There are no other carriages on the line; you will have to spend four nights and three days in the company of filthy emigrants, in very close company, alas! for the train will be crowded.”

At the post office I met a Dutchman who was going the same way.

## TRAVELLING FOURTH CLASS

"It will be very rough travelling," he said. "I hope you have brought a letter from St. Petersburg?"

"Yes, we have a letter," I replied, "but how can that help us?"

"You had better take it at once to the station-master," was the reply; "he may be able to prevent your compartment from being overcrowded."

I at once took a droshky and drove to the station, a distance of two miles, for we were to leave at twelve that night for Lake Baikal, and there was no time to lose. Not a soul at the station understood anything but Russian. However the station-master read the letter and reassured me with bows and smiles.

When the evening came we had kind friends to see us off, and just before starting had the good fortune to be introduced to some agreeable German-speaking tourists. These gentlemen were going no farther than to the other side of the Lake. Like every one else they did their utmost to discourage us. "There will be no porters to carry your luggage,"

## A RIBBON OF IRON

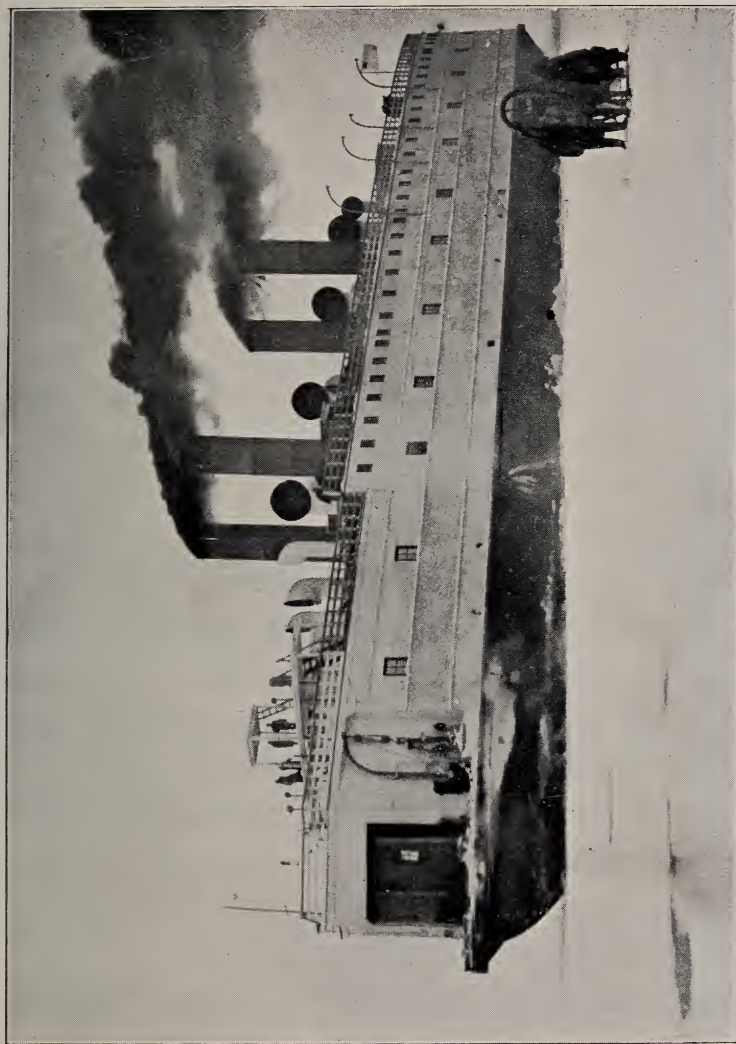
they said. "You will have to carry it yourselves."

"We are taking no heavy luggage," I replied.

We passed the night in pleasant conversation, forgetting the hard seats in thankfulness that there were no emigrants in our division. At 5 a.m. we saw the Baikal. Then, in their efforts to help us, the tourists seized our baggage and lifted it out as soon as the train stopped, declaring that we might look in vain for porters at such a spot. At that very moment several of these useful personages hurried up and relieved our "Job's comforters" of their self-imposed task.

There lay the far-famed ice-breaker, puffing dark smoke from its three huge funnels, and standing so high above the water level that we shuddered to think how it would roll if caught in a storm. Of the storms that are to be met with on the Baikal we had heard enough.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "They say at Irkutsk," wrote Dr. Lansdell, "it is only upon the Baikal in the Autumn that a man learns to pray from his heart."



Ice-breaker on the Baikal.





## TRAVELLING FOURTH CLASS

Like the model we had seen at the Paris Exhibition, the ice-breaker had a great door in its stern with rails laid down to receive goods in their trucks direct without unloading. As this part was not yet in working order we found men busily unloading and disappearing with their burdens through the cavernous opening. Passengers who had hurried ahead to secure the best berths were returning with downcast faces ; they had been told that they could not be admitted for an hour or more.

Just as we were preparing to sit down on our baggage and wait with the rest, a ship's officer came out inquiring for the English ladies. He told us that a first-class cabin had been reserved for us and proceeded at once to conduct us thither. The other passengers looked curiously after us as we disappeared within the great portals. Passing through the body of the ship, a large warehouse-looking place, supported on either side by elephantine pillars of iron, we ascended a skeleton staircase at the further end and found ourselves in quite another world. Here was

## A RIBBON OF IRON

a luxurious saloon fitted up with every comfort, and a buffet at the inner end. A passage round the outside of it—reached by descending a few steps to right or left—opened into first-class cabins on the right and second on the left. Ours was delightfully airy, with a nice square window instead of a porthole, and two comfortable velvet-covered couches. We crossed the lake in about four hours and a half. The ice-breaker might have been on rails so steadily did it move along.

The neighbourhood round Lake Baikal is of a volcanic nature. I heard from a doctor in Irkutsk that an earthquake was felt there about a year ago which disturbed the sick people in their beds. In winter the ice on the lake has the peculiarity that it closes together after having been cut through. This is the result of the continual pressure of water from the sides and of the many currents.<sup>1</sup> The Angara flows through the whole length of the lake. In addition to this cause of dis-

<sup>1</sup> Of the 336 rivers that flow into the Baikal the Angara is the only one that flows out of it.

## TRAVELLING FOURTH CLASS

turbance there are volcanic forces working below; hence the tradition that a drowning man is thrown out, rather than sucked in, as would be the case in other waters.

There are only four lakes larger than the Baikal—Lake Superior, Lake Michigan, Lake Huron and Lake Nyanza. In shape and length it has been compared to the Tanganyika. The greatest depth that has been measured as yet is three thousand one hundred and eighty-five feet; its height above the sea level is one thousand five hundred and sixty-one feet; hence its bottom is much below the sea level. While its length is six hundred versts it is in parts only twenty-seven wide. Some of the mountains in its neighbourhood are very beautiful, but they do not rise more than four thousand five hundred feet above the water. The surrounding scenery is compared by some to that of certain parts of Scotland. The mountains form more than eighty capes, most of which have received their names from some particular plant, tree or fish, that happens to be found there.

## A RIBBON OF IRON

The island of Olkhon is considered sacred by the Bouriats, who believe it to be the home of an infernal deity called Begdozy, in whose keeping are the souls of the wicked. To this deity they offer innumerable sacrifices. The Mongolians also have a story about this island. They believe that it was once the home of Genghis Khan.

In Irkutsk we heard a report, which has since been confirmed, that the land on the further side of the Baikal was rich in naphtha springs. To a lover of nature who has seen the desolation wrought by naphtha wells on the Caspian this news cannot fail to cause a feeling of regret. We shuddered at the thought that the beautiful shores of the Baikal might one day be polluted by the presence of a "black town," and the sweet country air be rendered noxious by the smell of petroleum.

The way in which the presence of naphtha was discovered is curious. Near the mouth of the river Tourka a substance like wax is frequently to be found floating on the water. The natives call it *baikerit* or "sea wax,"



## TRAVELLING FOURTH CLASS

and employ it as an external remedy for rheumatism ; it burns quickly, with a clear flame, and forms much soot. M. Chamarin, of Irkutsk, collected some of this substance and finally distilled from it a yellow oil containing all the properties of an excellent petroleum.

In June and July one may generally count on having a calm passage. It is during these months that a quantity of wrack is thrown up from the bottom of the lake, and the natives call this "its flowering time."

In winter, when the lake is crossed by sleighs, the ice becomes three and a half feet thick ; but, owing to the continual and violent movement of the water, it freezes slowly and the surface is not completely covered with ice till the end of December. Throughout the winter, in spite of the great thickness of the ice, immense fissures and heaps of broken ice are continually forming. The fissures are often as much as six feet wide and more than a mile long. Their formation is accompanied by a loud cracking sound like thunder. Water at once fills them and forms a kind of river.



## A RIBBON OF IRON

In about a week or a fortnight this river freezes, but at the same time new fissures are formed in other directions. In spring the ice takes two months to melt.

There is a remarkable kind of fish said to be found only in the Baikal,—it is called “Golomianka” (*Comephorus baicalensis*), and is to be found in the deepest parts of the lake very far below the surface. It has never been seen alive, for when it rises to the sunlight it expires. It does not lay eggs, so say the fishermen, but gives birth to two young ones at a time.

There are also several kinds of sponge peculiar to this lake; one is of a rich green colour and contains chlorophyll. The natives use it, just as it is, to clean the copper of their samovars, while jewellers in Irkutsk use it in a dry state to polish silver.

The railway round the end of the lake will hardly be completed before 1905, on account of the numerous tunnels required.

While we were having our lunch in the saloon of the ice-breaker we could see from

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the windows a group of exiled criminals, squatting on the deck, picnic fashion, with their wives and children around them. All looked perfectly happy and contented. One family sat on their heels in a ring, each child held a saucerful of tea in one hand and a piece of bread and butter in the other. Presently the father rose to pour out more tea, and we saw that a heavy chain was fastened to each foot above the ankle and caught up to his leathern belt. Sad indeed their lot might be ; but certainly, as we saw them then, they looked as happy as any gentleman's family on their own yacht. When we had landed, and were waiting for our train, we suddenly heard a great clanking of chains, and turning our heads in that direction saw a band of criminals march out of the great doorway, and deposit, one after another in a large heap, the regulation sacks in which they carried their worldly goods.

## Chapter XII

### TRANSBAIKALIA

A TRAIN composed of fourth-class carriages stood waiting for the passengers as they came off the ice-breaker. We got into a compartment and tried to keep it to ourselves, but there was no sign of starting, and more and more people kept coming in. Those who got there first took the lower places, and the rest clambered up on to the shelves above, which were three deep. At last those above us became an object of desire to two men of so dirty and unkempt an appearance that we became desperate. I put up my hands to ward them off, and cried "Conductor" in the most threatening tones I could muster. It was no use; they had gone into the next division, but only to climb quietly over into our shelves when they thought we were not looking. The sight

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of a wretched pair of feet hanging out over my head was too much for me. I rushed on to the platform, and addressed the first man in uniform I came across. This happened to be an engineer who had charge of that part of the line. As he spoke French I was able to explain what was the matter. He came with me at once to our compartment. The two men seeing him approach slid stealthily back the way they had come.

"This is not a fit place for ladies," said our new friend, looking round at our grimy companions—"and *English* ladies too! Oh, this will never do. I will arrange something better for you." Then he hurried off. In a few minutes he came back to say that he had ordered an engineer's private carriage to be put on the train for us. "You will have sleeping berths and a little room with a samovar, where you can make tea," he added; "but it will not be ready for two hours. I fear you must wait here till then."

The two hours seemed as though they would never pass, and the dirty men had climbed

## A RIBBON OF IRON

above us once more. At last, when it was getting quite dark, the engineer came again.

"I am very sorry," he said, "but a telegram has come ordering us to keep the carriage I promised you for an official from St. Petersburg, who is expected shortly. His Excellency, M. Iswolsky and his family, who passed through last week, took all the other carriages. What I can do for you I will. A captain and six soldiers have got a luggage van to themselves. If you don't mind sharing it with them as far as Stretinsk, I will have part of it curtained off for you."

"Anything, anything but this," we cried.

Once more he left us and we waited on. The night was getting chilly and rain began to come down in torrents. At length two men appeared with a lantern. They were the engineer and the conductor. The engineer gave my mother his arm, and they escorted us out into the rain and along the line to the last carriage on the train. The step was very high, but we clambered in.

How we blessed that kind engineer! With



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curtains from his own house he had partitioned off one corner of the luggage van for our use. The deal boards that had been put there for the soldiers were all we had to sleep on by night, or to sit on by day. But that was nothing so long as we had it all to ourselves. The size of our *coupé* was ten feet by eight. In the centre of the van was a stove with a chimney going through the roof.

“The captain thought you might be cold, so he made the soldiers light a fire,” said the engineer, and we were most grateful for the genial warmth, for we had got wet as well as cold in coming across.

With heartfelt thanks we bade our deliverer good night, and the train started. It was just midnight.

Of course there was no going to bed for us that night, or for the three that followed. We lay down just as we were on our rugs, which we had folded as thickly as possible to take off the hardness of the eighteen inch boards. Oh, how our bones ached after ten minutes in one position!

## A RIBBON OF IRON

My mother had the side nearest the curtain ; a soldier slept on a similar board to ours on the other side of it, and she occasionally felt his elbow. We had a tiny window in the corner, so high up that to look out we had to stand on the seat. *Still, we had it all to ourselves.*

Three days and four nights we spent in that luggage van. The soldiers and their captain were kindness itself. They fetched us hot water and milk at the stations, and when we came short of bread gave us some of their own, which was brown, with sour lumps of uncooked dough here and there.

As the line was not yet open to the general public there were no buffets ready. We lived on bread, milk and tea. We washed our faces every morning with some of the water brought for tea. Happily we had neither dust nor extreme heat to contend with ; for there was a gentle and continuous rain nearly all the time.

The next two vans to ours were prison vans. The windows were strongly barred, and instead of ordinary doors they had a sliding one in the side with a special lock.

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Four of our soldiers sprang out the moment the train stopped, no matter whether there was a station or not, and stood with shouldered bayonets one on either side of each of the prison vans. Whenever I looked up at the prison bars I saw a cluster of children's faces peering out—hardly ever a man's face. The prisoners must have spent their time in sleep. There certainly did not seem much danger of their escaping. Once one of the soldiers picked some flowers and handed them in to the children. They stretched out their hands eagerly, and looked so pleased to get them.

For at least thirty-six hours heavy raindrops pattered unceasingly on the roof of our carriage. Every bit of low-lying ground had become a marsh, and the trees and bushes were heavy with water. The many streamlets that we passed were overflowing their banks. It was evening when the weather at last showed signs of change. Ahead of us the rain clouds had become a bright blue, which contrasted strangely with the brilliant green of the landscape.

Early on the morning of the third day we

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reached Chitá, and found it to be a flourishing town picturesquely situated among wooded hills. Many of the best houses, as I afterwards learnt, were hidden from view, and it was really a larger place than it looked from the station. We had introductions to people in Chitá, and had fully intended to spend a few days there, but the thought of leaving our cosy corner and having to travel for the rest of the way with emigrants was too appalling. We decided to go on in the luggage van, to which we had become quite attached, and not to break our journey again till we got to Stretinsk.

We were now travelling through the region known as Transbaikalia, which covers more square miles than the whole of the German Empire. Lying between Lake Baikal and the Upper Amur, it is bounded on the north by Yakutsk, a country of reindeer, frozen marshes, and unfriendly climate, and on the south and south-east by China.

The entire surface of this territory may be characterized as mountainous, with the exception of one narrow strip of country in the



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neighbourhood of the river Onon. Its highest peaks, many of which are covered with snow throughout the whole year, belong to the Yabloni chain, which, commencing in Mongolia, crosses the frontier and divides Transbaikalia into two great terraces of almost equal size. These terraces again are divided by other and lower chains of mountains separated from one another by narrow valleys and occasional plateaux covered for the most part with dense forests, many of which have never been penetrated by human foot.

The land is watered by many rivers, a number of which are navigable and afford valuable ways of communication. Their most important basins are those of Lake Baikal and the rivers Lena and Amur. The Sélenga, which, rising in Mongolia and crossing the frontier in the vicinity of Krachtka, waters the most fertile part of the country, flows at length into Lake Baikal, and forms a waterway between Russia and China, whose importance, great as it is at present, is likely to increase rather than diminish as the years go on. Until the year 1894 the



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navigation of the Sélena was in the hands of a steamship company. Today no such company exists, and the whole of this extensive water traffic is a source of untold wealth to one private individual!

To men with capital Siberia is indeed a land of promise, and the case in point is a remarkable instance of that truth. When the Sélena Company dissolved, a Siberian merchant, M. Niemtchinof, stepped in and bought up all its steamers and barges. As no competition exists this gentleman has it in his power to impose the most extravagant freightage, which often exceeds the value of the goods themselves. Besides a large quantity of other merchandise, it is estimated that upwards of 80,000 puds of tea pass annually from China into Russia by way of the Sélena.

Another river of extreme importance to this territory is the Shilka; it is formed by the confluence of two smaller streams, the Ingoda and the Onon. So far the Ingoda has not been navigated; it is, however, of great use to the inhabitants of the interior, who float

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their goods upon its waters by means of rafts, which, on arriving at their destination, are usually broken up and used for firewood.

From the interior the Shilka flows in a north-easterly direction till, widened by the waters of several important affluents, it empties itself into the Amur, to which it has become equal in size if not in length. Thus it forms a continuation of the great waterway of the Amur. Steamers belonging to the Amur companies proceed up the Shilka to Stretinsk and about two hundred miles beyond. It is more than probable that within the next few years a special flat-bottomed steamer will be introduced, such as is now being used so successfully in Canadian rivers with water only one foot deep. It will then be possible to navigate not only the whole length of the Shilka, but also the greater part of the Ingoda. It must be remembered, however, that these Siberian rivers are not merely covered with ice, but frozen to their lowest depths for more than half the year, and can be navigated only between the months of April and October.

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During that time another hindrance is often met with in the shape of dense white mist, which makes it impossible for steamers to proceed, and consequently keeps them stationary till eight if not ten o'clock in the morning, when it is finally dispersed by brilliant sunshine.

The temperature of Transbaikalia is peculiar. Sudden changes from great heat to intense cold are frequent, and July is the only month of the year that is entirely free from frost. It is here that the earth is in many places frozen all the year round to the depth of several feet beneath the surface. Yet in spite of this phenomenon the country is in the main wonderfully fertile, and well adapted to the several branches of agriculture. Healthful rains in springtime, cloudless sky in summer, and a transparent atmosphere coupled with the strength of the sun's rays, all work marvels, and within an almost incredibly short space of time the wintry scene is transformed to one of verdant beauty.

It was not till the year 1664, that is more than sixty years after Yermak had conquered

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Western Siberia, that Russians first penetrated as far as Transbaikalia. Before that time the country was inhabited by Tungús, Daurians, and Mongols. From the last-named people we learn that it was here, on the banks of the Onon, that their great chieftain, Genghis Khan, first saw the light of day. Even now native tribes venerate the name of that celebrated hero, and recount to their children those wondrous legends of his prowess that have been handed down to them from generation to generation.

The present population may be divided into three principal groups: peasants, Cossacks, and aborigines; while colonists, soldiers, convicts and exiles form only a very small part of the whole.

The peasant population is composed chiefly of men who have left Russia for Russia's good; but there are voluntary emigrants among them, and there is also a large proportion of families who have been exiled on account of their religion.

The Cossacks of Transbaikalia occupy the fourth place among the eleven branches into



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which the Cossack race may be divided, viz.: those of the Don—of Kouban—of Orenburg—of Transbaikalia—of Tersk—of Siberia—of the Urals—of Astrakhan—of Sémirétchensk—of the Amur—and lastly of the Ussuri district. According to the latest statistics they number in Transbaikalia as many as two hundred thousand souls. In return for their military services they are exempt from taxes, and enjoy certain other privileges which are not granted to the ordinary Siberian settler.

When Russia wished to colonize the Amur Province after its conquest in 1854, she carried off five thousand Cossacks from this district and posted them at various points along the Amur river. It was by the descendants of these men, wild, untaught, and savage to the backbone, that upwards of six thousand helpless Manchus, some of them women and children, were brutally massacred outside the town of Blagovestchensk in July, 1900.

The aborigines of Transbaikalia are represented by two tribes, the Tungús and the Bouriats. The former are Shamanists; they



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lead a nomadic life like other mongol tribes, and are to be found from the Yenisei to the Pacific Ocean. They spend most of their time in hunting and fishing. The latter—the Bouriats—are Buddhists, and have for their religious worship in different parts of the country a building called a “datsan.” There is a famous one about twenty-five versts from the town of Sélenghinsk on the Sélenga. The architecture of the “datsan” is decidedly Chinese, as also are the pigtails of the men. Living as they do, so close to the frontier of China, these people have probably borrowed many of their customs from that country. With the help of wide pasture lands they breed not only cattle, but camels, horses, sheep, goats and pigs. The animals are turned out to graze in great herds and find their own food during a good part of the year, apparently unaffected by the severity of the climate. A large trade is carried on in the skins of their cattle, which are sent in great quantities to Irkutsk, where they are used for packing tea.

Like most regions of Siberia, Transbaikalia is

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rich in minerals. Its silver mines are already famous, but its gold, copper, lead and coal mines have hardly begun to be exploited.

In July, 1900, that section of the great Siberian railway, which runs through Transbaikalia as far as Stretinsk, was declared open. It has in all thirty-four stations. The first, Myssova, is situated close to the eastern landing stage of Lake Baikal, and takes its name from the neighbouring town, or rather village, whose population is composed for the most part of exiled criminals of the worst type. Robbery, theft, and even murder, are here the order of the day. Every respectable Russian must be able to produce his passport when required, and escaped convicts having no papers of their own are anxious to possess themselves of those belonging to their neighbours. Many a foul murder is the result.

From Myssova our train passed through Verkne-Oudinsk, Chitá, and Nertchinsk to Stretinsk, which is at present the terminus of the railway.

Verkne-Oudinsk, on the Sélenga, is one of the

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oldest Russian towns in Transbaikalia. Its chief church, which goes by the name of a cathedral, dates as far back as the year 1745. There are three other churches, a number of chapels, a Jewish synagogue, and flourishing schools for boys and girls respectively. An annual fair held in the month of January has an important effect on the trade of the country, and numerous factories, chiefly of soap and candles, with a brewery and seventeen tanneries, keep the lower classes of the population well employed.

The town of Chitá, to-day the most important in Transbaikalia, is reached, starting from Lake Baikal, after a journey of three days and three nights, the train moving at the rate of ten to seventeen miles an hour. With the exception of Verkne-Oudinsk no towns of interest are passed on the way. The stations all along the line at regular intervals are hardly worthy of the name; a tiny log cottage and a water tower are often the only signs of life visible when the train pulls up, and it is well for the comfort of travellers that they have a buffet on board.

In the year 1827, when Chitá was chosen as a

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place of banishment for certain political offenders, the Decabrists, it was still an insignificant village with scarcely three hundred inhabitants. The men who were sent there belonged to the highest aristocracy of Russia. On their arrival the prison house was found to be absolutely unfit for habitation. A new prison had to be built, and the exiles were ordered to take part in the work. Thanks to their energy, the new building was completed before winter set in. The wives of many of these noblemen followed their husbands into voluntary exile, and, after undergoing untold hardships succeeded in reaching Chitá, where they remained till the period of banishment was over. The brave conduct of these heroic women moved every heart. The poet Nekrasof has immortalized their names in a beautiful poem, which opens with a father's lament at his daughter's determination to brave unprotected the unknown horrors of a journey into the heart of Siberia. The poem has been translated into French; it is entitled "*Les Femmes Russes.*" Up to this day there is a



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street in Chitá called "the Street of the Ladies" in their memory.

During the three years and seven months of their self-imposed banishment these ladies did much to improve the state of the poor around them. Their influence and their money gave new life to the place. From that time it began to improve rapidly, and the improvement has been going on ever since. When the Manchurian war broke out in the autumn of 1900 Chitá became a halting-place for officers and troops on their way to Manchuria. In September the town was described to me as "quite gay" with ladies who had accompanied their husbands and brothers as far as they could on their way to the front.

Chitá is becoming an important commercial centre. Its industries are developing rapidly and its annual revenue is 100,000 roubles. In 1897 the first number of a Siberian journal appeared here under the title of *Life in the Orient*. Exempt from censorship, it is published both in Russian and Mongolian. There is also a daily paper.



## Chapter XIII

### STRETINSK

If thou art pained by any external thing, it is not this thing that disturbs thee, but thy judgement about it, and it is in thy power to wipe out this judgement now.

M. AURELIUS.

THE next town of interest through which we passed was Nertchinsk. It is a very old town compared to Chitá, for it dates back to the year 1658. Dr. Lansdell (in referring to the inaccessibility of the place when there was no railway) wrote: "Nertchinsk is five thousand two hundred and fifty miles east of St. Petersburg, seven hundred miles nearly due north of Pekin, about four hundred and eighty miles north of the Chinese wall, and one thousand miles west of the Pacific."

At such a distance the horrors of convict prisons could be safely magnified. As for ourselves, our intention to inspect, on our

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return from Japan, the mines of which we had heard so much, was frustrated, the insurgents having set up batteries along our route. I cannot therefore speak from personal observation.

Convicts certainly do work in the mines up to the present day, but they receive regularly a tenth of the sum gained by their work. It is also true that all the work that has to be done in connexion with the prisons is done by the prisoners. When the time of their sentence has expired they leave the prisons to join the ranks of those who have been transported for life. The number of men in Transbaikalia alone who have been transported for life is no less than seventeen thousand. Many of them are both very poor and very lazy and their presence is by no means agreeable to their more respectable neighbours. When a number of these lawless men plot mischief it is in their power to do a great deal of harm. Only as far back as the beginning of September 1900 a band of these desperadoes lifted the rails in front of a train that was on its way from Lake Baikal to Chitá. They had noticed that it was

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composed of luggage vans, and were prepared for plunder. The train smashed up. It was not carrying luggage, but soldiers bound for Manchuria! No less than eleven of these unfortunate men were killed on the spot, while thirty others were seriously wounded. As for the wreckers, they disappeared as soon as they discovered their mistake.

I am thankful that the van in which we travelled was not considered worthy of being thus wrecked.

There was a young topographer, with his newly married wife, on another part of our train. They were bound for Khabarovsk. I used to see them get out at the stations. While the devoted husband ran with a big tin kettle to fetch water, the wife would pick flowers or glance at me with a supercilious air as though she wondered where on earth I had come from; and well she might wonder to see me regularly disappear in the direction of the convict vans, while the rest of the passengers were taking their seats in the fourth-class carriages.

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Three days and three nights had passed since we crossed the Baikal, and we were half through our fourth night in the van when the captain woke us with the words "Stretinsk, Stretinsk!"

The train had stopped, but there was no need for haste, for we had reached the terminus of the railway, and could go no farther. We strapped up our rugs by the light of a candle with which the captain provided us, and were just wondering where we should find an hotel, when a man of the Hebrew race in ship's uniform appeared on the scene. He told us in broken German that he was the captain of a steamboat, bound for Blagovestchensk, and would take us there for I forget how many roubles each.

"My boat starts at 8 a.m. tomorrow," he said. "You will not need to go to an hotel; you can come on board at once."

This sounded very tempting, but I replied: "We are going by the *post* steamer."

"Ah, then you must wait five days and perhaps longer," he replied, "for the post



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steamer is not in yet, and when she comes she will stay here several days before starting."

Seeing me obdurate, the man departed somewhat crestfallen to try his luck with the other passengers. The doors of the convict vans were now slid back and the convicts stepped out one by one, their chains clanking as they walked. Each carried a white sack such as I have already described. One by one they walked to the river side and deposited their sacks in a heap. How each knew his own sack again, I never knew. I suppose they were numbered. This done they were marched into a large ferry boat that lay waiting. Then our things were carried down. We had not the faintest notion what was going to happen next, till the captain, who understood that we wished to go to an hotel, pointed across the river to where the town lay, and explained by signs that we too must go across in the ferry. He next pointed to a soldier who had come to meet the train, and made us understand that he had given him orders to find us an hotel. We were not sorry to have a protector, for day was only just





Stretensk.



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beginning to break, and the river looked very weird. As for the town, we could not see it, for its lights were out. All the convicts had to be packed into their end of the ferry boat and then we went on board. The soldier had bought us tickets at two kopeks<sup>1</sup> each; we were then ferried across. It was difficult to find a droshky, and when we found one the man refused to take any baggage, so we had to look for a second. At last we were started, and drove to an hotel. After we had waited an age, a man, who had evidently been roused from a deep sleep, came to the door and told us that every room was engaged. Just then we caught sight of a tall priest in a long brown coat with loose sleeves, and a straw hat over his long curly hair, who walked past our droshky. We had seen him on the train; he too was looking for a room.

We now drove in the direction of a second hotel. I confess that I felt glad that the priest, being on foot, would not be able to get there

<sup>1</sup> A kopek is equal to  $\frac{1}{6}$  of a penny.

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first. But my selfishness was well rewarded, for the second hotel was also full. The priest must have walked fast, for here he was again.

Our third attempt was, however, crowned with success. There was a room that we could have. While our things were being brought in the priest again put in his appearance. I felt generous now, and was quite pleased when he also got accommodation.

The droshky man would take nothing less than three roubles, the most exorbitant price we had ever paid, considering that all the hotels were fairly close together.

Our soldier now left us, and we retired, not for the night, for that was gone, but for the short time that remained before it was broad daylight. The room contained a wretched bed and a worse sofa ; the springs of the latter were broken and rose in lumps with pointed corners, as I soon discovered. I lay still till I could see my way about, and then went to look for the kitchen in the hope of getting hot water for a bath. It was no use trying to sleep. A few planks with great spaces between them, and

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a sheet hung over the whole, was all that separated us from our next neighbour, who snored loudly. Two sides of the room had windows without shutters, and the fourth side a door with cracks. In one corner of this cowshed, for it deserved no better name, was a Japanese screen. This article of furniture rejoiced my eyes, not only because it was the first sign to remind us that we were nearing Japan, but also because, by standing behind it in the corner of the room farthest from the door, I could just manage to escape the observation of the people who were already passing the blindless windows. I do not quite know why, but I was in a towering rage. Thinking it might be partly due to hunger, I made some tea from the water that was left in the samovar after I had had my bath.

“What makes you so cross?” said my mother, who had slept in spite of the snoring.

“Let us leave this wretched hole,” I cried; “nothing would induce me to spend another hour in it. I will go out and explore while you take your bath.”



## A RIBBON OF IRON

At the door I met a party of travellers who had just arrived from somewhere. The first was a Russian officer. I addressed him in French, then German, then English, but to no purpose; he simply pointed to two little girls who were behind. I was just trying German on the little girls, who looked greatly bewildered, when a lady came up. I turned to her in desperation and asked if she spoke French.

"Of course I speak French," she replied, and she tossed her head with a look of astonishment, as much as to say, "Pray what next?"

"They have put us to sleep in a cowshed," I cried. "Oh, when will the post steamer arrive? This is beyond endurance."

"We have just come by the post steamer," replied the lady, gradually thawing. "It will remain here two days, after which it will start for Blagovestchensk. You can go on board at once. It is not a steamer, but a barge drawn by a rope. You will have to change into a steamer at Pokrovskaya, where the Shilka joins the Amur. I will come with you to the agent and intrepert."

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Most gratefully I accepted the offer, and we were soon on our way to the wharf. The agent was very polite. He showed much commiseration when he heard how we were situated.

"By all means go on board at once," he said.

Returning to the hotel I ordered a droshky to wait at the door, and went to fetch my mother and pay the bill. I had to stamp my foot before the man would bring it. He thought it too early in the day. When he did bring it I found that he had charged three roubles for all that misery, besides food and attendance. Just as our baggage was being brought out the lady who had gone with me to the boat came to see if our room was any better than the one they had given her.

"This is as bad as mine," she said. "I may as well stay where I am."

"Are you travelling for *pleasure*?" was her next remark.

"We are travelling to see, but not to suffer," I replied, and then I asked if *she* was travelling for pleasure.

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"My husband is a colonel," she answered. "We have been stationed for three years at Blagovestchensk, and are now only too thankful to leave it. But there is an Englishman in our party, so you can talk your own language," and she turned to a young artillery officer who stood near. It had never entered my head that a Russian officer could be an Englishman. He came up looking rather shy.

"I have lived so long in Blagovestchensk without hearing a word of English," he said, "that now I find it difficult to speak."

"We will come and see you on the boat," said the lady as we drove off. When they came, they found us comfortably ensconced in a little first-class cabin with three berths.

"Ah! you were wise to come here," they said; "the hotel is indeed dreadful. Our train does not start till midnight."

I expressed a hope that they would enjoy travelling with the emigrants.

"We are a large party," the lady replied. "We shall get a whole carriage to ourselves, so it won't be so bad."

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During the two days and a half that we were obliged to wait in Stretinsk we made a home of the cabin and went to the Station Hotel for our meals. The Station Hotel, notwithstanding its grand name, was but little better than the one I have already described. When entering it for the first time we turned back on the threshold, thinking we had got into the kitchen quarters by mistake. Such was the best hotel in Stretinsk.

Stretinsk is a Cossack town extending for nearly three quarters of a mile along the east bank of the river Shilka. A range of picturesque hills rises abruptly behind the narrow line of houses, and prevents the town from spreading in that direction. Houses are rapidly springing up on the other side of the river; but behind them also there are hills, so that by the very nature of the place it must always increase lengthways along the river.

Our spirits rose when we looked at the river Shilka for the first time, for it was wider and deeper than we had been led to expect.

“The water is rising,” we were told; “there



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will probably be enough water to enable you to start at the appointed time."

"What do you think of Stretinsk?" asked the Colonel's wife when she came to see us. "It is not a town at all you know, but just a big Cossack village, and it will never be anything else while it is in the hands of the Cossacks. They are great riders, great drinkers and great sleepers, that is about all."

There was a bitter ring in her voice as she spoke, which found an echo in my own heart; and our feelings towards the Cossacks did not become more friendly when, as we went shopping together, she was charged a rouble and a half (three shillings) for a piece of soap worth threepence, and I a shilling for a tiny bottle of methylated spirit.

Until I arrived at Stretinsk and had personal dealings with them I had cherished a secret admiration for the Cossacks. Was not the brave Yermak, the first conqueror of Siberia, a Cossack? And what would be Russia's position in the far East today but for the services that have been rendered to her by these brave



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pioneers, half soldiers, half brigands though they be?

Our Cossack laundress never thought of ironing the things she washed for us. She spread them out to bleach in the sun, and brought them back rough-dried. Considering this, her price was exorbitant, being twice what we should have paid in Paris to have them properly done. But how could we be angry with her when she was the most beautiful woman of her class we had ever seen! Lithe and tall as a young larch she held her head like a queen, and looked at us so innocently from her lovely grey-blue eyes that we were quite overcome. Her clear gipsy complexion was set off by strings of many coloured beads, which she wore round her bare neck. Amongst them was a handsome amber necklace, which hung down over her oriental looking kerchief, and added greatly to the general effect. A mass of rich golden hair was tied up loosely in two plaits at the back of her neck. She took a seat in our cool cabin without being asked, and gave a sigh of relief as she pushed back a stray curl from her hot forehead.

## A RIBBON OF IRON

The interpretation we put upon her words was, "Ah, you have no idea how hot it is up there on the hillside, where there is no shade." She was very grateful for a cup of tea, which happened to be ready on the table. As for the bill, we paid her all she asked, just because she was so beautiful, and were quite sorry when she rose to go.

Some of these Cossacks are very good natured. One man, of whom I bought a large bag of walnuts, a nut so plentiful in these parts, took the trouble to crack each nut separately with a pound weight before he put them into the bag. And all this time his other customers looked on with laughing faces but not a sign of impatience. The predominant colour in the Cossack uniform is bright yellow. It is by this that they can easily be distinguished from the peasants around.

Half the people we passed in the streets were Manchus, wearing wide brimmed hats, long pig-tails, and bright blue cotton blouses, over loose pantaloons of the same material. To me their appearance was quite girlish, and I actually

## STRETINSK

thought at first that some of them were women. These people strutted about with an air of great assurance, as though the place belonged to them, and squatted at the street corners in true eastern fashion. Their hats were the first straw ones we had seen since leaving Moscow.

There was something else that reminded us how far east we had come, the sight of English and American pickles, tinned meats and biscuits in the shops. The high prices asked for these articles were not extravagant considering that they had come all the way round by Vladivostok.

## Chapter XIV

### ON THE SHILKA

Völlig fremde und gegen einander gleichgültige Menschen, wenn sie eine Zeitlang zusammen leben, kehren ihr Inneres wechselzeitig heraus, und es muss eine gewisse Vertraulichkeit entstehen.

GOETHE.

ON Monday, June 18, we began our river travelling in good earnest. A lady, whose husband was director of a boys' gymnasium at Blagovestchensk, had come on board the previous night. She had a little boy three years of age with her. These two shared the third berth in our cabin. Opposite our door was that of the dining saloon. There was a long table down the centre and a wide velvet seat like a sofa running round the walls. Here we had lunch, dinner and afternoon tea. The first meal was served just as we were moving away from Stretinsk.

## ON THE SHILKA

The director's wife spoke a little French, and there were two young men from Riga who spoke German. A number of gentlemen passengers came on board just as we were about to start. One of these was elder brother to the little boy in our cabin. He wore the uniform of a medical student and, as we afterwards learned, was returning home to Blagovestchensk for the summer vacation. The priest in the long brown coat was also there.

I was greatly puzzled to know where all these people were going to pack themselves for the night. Besides our cabin there was a small one for two people in the very front of the boat, but this was already occupied by a gentleman and his manservant. When night came however the mystery was solved, for all the men squeezed themselves into the dining saloon, and after drinking beer and smoking for some time, stretched themselves out upon the velvet sofas. As many of them did not rise till midday we ladies had to breakfast in our cabin.

"We have great luck," said the director's wife when we were well started. "The water rose



## A RIBBON OF IRON

fourteen feet during the night ; but for that we should have been unable to proceed."

It was very hot ; the sun shone each day with intense power between the hours of eleven and four. Then the air became steadily cooler till sunset, when we were glad to put on warm wraps and even to draw our heaviest rugs around us. The cool fresh nights came as a refreshing boon ; they brought new life and sound sleep.

When we awoke in the morning the air was still cold and bracing, and it was hard to believe that at midday we should again be prostrate from the heat. There was no awning under which we could sit, and only a very narrow deck on which to walk or stand. We used to take chairs up from the saloon and sit wherever we could get the least bit of shade ; but about 10 a.m. the sun was too high to be kept off in this way. The centre of the boat, or rather the roof of the house part of it, was covered with a large piece of tarpaulin. Some of the passengers used to climb on the roof and lie under it, but that was hot work. The only way to escape the sun was to go below, and then you were

## ON THE SHILKA

deprived of the life-giving breeze, and tormented to distraction by two kinds of flies. There were small ones, such as we have in every house at home, and large ones with green heads, larger than bluebottles. These latter have an unpleasant way of pricking you as if with a needle. They come very quietly, and the first intimation you receive of their presence is that merciless prick. Before trying to get an afternoon nap we used to flick every fly that was visible out of our cabin window and then hang a wet towel over the opening. When the heat was at its worst we sat with wet handkerchiefs on our heads and basins of cold water at hand, into which we could dip them as they began to dry. There was one happy couple who did not seem to mind either the flies or the heat so much as other people. They sat out in the sun for hours clasping each other's waists and looking the picture of contentment. It was clear that this was their wedding trip. But what a honeymoon! And where could they be going to? The young man had a shock of uncombed hair, but the lady was a picture of neatness.

## A RIBBON OF IRON

Before the end of the second day I saw the faces of quite a number of people I had not observed before. Who could they be? and where did they come from, I wondered. We had certainly stopped at no town to pick them up. It was not until days after, when I made the acquaintance of some of them on the Amur steamer, that I discovered that they were in reality first-class passengers who, rather than wait for another steamer, were travelling third class, as first and second were full up.

The scenery on the Shilka was very beautiful. Almost immediately after leaving Stretinsk we had high granite rocks on both sides of us, some rising bare and jagged, others covered with short thick fir trees. Once in a ravine we saw a large patch of unmelted snow. Happy snow, to keep cool while we were so hot!

It was considered dangerous to proceed in the dark, so the little steamer that tugged us along used to bring us to a convenient resting place about ten each night, and then, dropping the rope, by which we were drawn, into the water, wheel quickly round and attach itself to the

## ON THE SHILKA

shore for the night. In the meantime our boatmen unwound the anchor on our boat and dropped it into the river. At 5 a.m. we used to be off again.

All our passengers were exceedingly gratified when we came upon the Jew's boat that had had nearly three days' start of us firmly stuck on a sandbank. The first thing I noticed was a party of boys bathing at the water's edge. Then a little farther on I saw a large motley crowd of people walking about like a swarm of bees. What they could all be doing on that bank, so far from any human habitation, I could not imagine. A few minutes later we were alongside of the Jew's boat, the *Ural*, and then I perceived that the people on the bank were the passengers who had turned out for a stroll or a bathe. They had been there a day and a half already. How pleased and self satisfied we all felt, as we swept past, to think that the captain of the *Ural* had not persuaded us to go in his boat!

This was our third day on the Shilka, and we hailed its close with delight, for we were heartily tired of our shadeless barge.



## A RIBBON OF IRON

We had anchored for the night as usual, and with the exception of two young men had all retired to our cabins. About midnight hurried steps along the deck led us to open our window and look out. Some one, it was whispered, had fallen into the water. The excitement increased. Men and women could be seen whispering mysteriously in the semi-darkness and peering into the dark water. The halfmoon shone red in the sky but gave little light to the weird scene. A gentleman presently recognizing my face at the window, stooped down and whispered in broken German the words "Student," "Mutter."

The director's wife could not possibly have heard the whisper for she was in her berth at the other side of the cabin. It must have been her mother's instinct that made her get up quickly and rush on deck before I could speak a word. I followed her and soon gathered from those around that the student and a young German had gone out in a small boat to have a midnight bathe, and that the latter had plunged into the river and been carried rapidly down



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stream. Feeling himself powerless to resist the current, he had cried for help, and a boatful of men had put off to the rescue.

The poor mother stood wringing her hands and moaning piteously. She felt quite sure that both were drowned. Some dreadful minutes passed. Then we heard a shout through the darkness ; it was a shout of joy ; and the words "All's well !" rang out clearly, first in Russian, then in German, and lastly in French. After a time the boat came alongside, and the student, leaping on board, sprang to where his mother stood.

"Mother ! mother !" he cried, "it is all right." But the poor woman stood speechless. She strove to speak, but the effort ended in a gasp.

"Mother ! dearest mother !" cried the youth, putting his arms around her. But she could not speak. I fetched some brandy and poured it down her throat. A doctor now came forward ; he had been attending to the German who had been carried in in a state of great exhaustion. Taking the poor lady's hand he

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led her back to the cabin, and her son followed in an agony of terror lest his mother's reason had been affected by the shock. They made her lie down, and after a little while, as they sat by her side, she fell asleep. When she awoke in the morning the power of speech had returned, to our immense relief, for we had shared the fears of her son. Sitting up in her berth she crossed herself many times, and then bowed her head in a prayer of thankfulness.

As for the German, he looked very pale for some days, and spoke no more of river bathing. We heard later that his last thought in the moment of danger was for his aged mother, who had begged him so hard to find employment nearer home and not to go to Siberia. He knew, he said, that a telegram announcing his death would kill her. The other German with whom he was travelling had stood with a cigarette in his mouth and a look of impenetrable calm during the whole of that painful scene. I was petrified by what I took to be his horrible callousness, and vowed inwardly that I would ignore his existence from that time forth.

## ON THE SHILKA

This vow I kept until about four days later, when we were on the Amur, and a lady doctor who had been with us on the Shilka—travelling third class—said to me, “I feel a kind of reverence for those natures that can bear the most acute mental torture with such outward calmness and such apparent indifference that on-lookers are deceived. Did you notice the behaviour of that German on the Shilka when he thought his friend was drowned?”

Several of the people on board had come direct from Moscow by the last post train. For them the drowning incident was neither the first unhappy occurrence nor the most tragic. Soon after passing the Urals their train had pulled up so suddenly that those who happened to be standing were thrown off their feet. A woman in the third class had seen a young man throw himself on the rails, from the platform between the carriages. A stream of blood along the line guided those who went in search to the spot where the young man lay. A ghastly sight awaited them, for the train had passed over his body and cut off both legs, while

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his head had received such frightful injuries that death must have been instantaneous.

When the train moved on a cloud seemed to have fallen on the passengers. All merriment had been checked, and gloom had taken the place of smiles. This state of things lasted more or less till they reached Irkutsk. Here one of the passengers, entering a church an hour or two after his arrival, found an old man weeping piteously in a secluded corner.

“What is your trouble, sir?” he ventured to ask. “My trouble?” answered the old man between his sobs. “I have just received news of the death of my son; he was to have arrived by the post train today. Alas! I know too well how it has all happened. He telegraphed to me from Moscow to say that he had got into the company of gamblers and lost all his money—two thousand roubles. I sent him money for the journey home, and told him to come at once, but the poor boy could not endure his disgrace, and—I have lost him.”

One long day on the Shilka was enlivened by the presence of two new passengers—ladies who



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came on board at one of the stopping-places early in the morning and left us after dark in the evening. The elder, who might have been forty years of age, had a jolly sunburnt face, a careless style of dress, and a straw sailor hat. The younger was a handsome girl of about twenty-five, dressed in a well fitting grey travelling dress, with a coquettish-looking pink ribbon round her throat and a dainty summer hat. Hearing us speak English she soon addressed us in that language, much to our surprise.

“I have come all the way from Switzerland,” she said with a pretty accent, “to visit this lady, who is my cousin. Her husband has gold mines on the Amur, and I am going to stay with them. Just think of it!—when we get off this boat we shall have to take a four hours’ drive in a springless cart, through a country without roads! That will be the worst part of the whole journey.”

Then she went on to tell us that she too had travelled in a luggage van. She had bought herself a mattress in Irkutsk and slept on the floor. She had travelled under the protection of a Russian count who was bringing his wife a new maid from St. Petersburg.



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“We used to wash our faces every morning from a large tin mug,” she said. “First the count washed his face, leaning out of the doorway, then he refilled the mug with water, and I had my turn; the maid came next. Before we had got half way to Stretinsk a lot of Jews came in. They also had mattresses—so that the van was quite full.”

I told her that I had been asked by the editor of a lady's paper to write some letters about those subjects connected with my journey that were most likely to interest women.

“How can I tell what *will* interest women?” I asked.

“Every girl ought to be interested in a journey like this,” she replied, “no matter what part of it you describe. When I am tired of the gold mines I shall take the route you are now taking. It is intensely interesting.”

We parted with many regrets in front of a most romantic looking little landing stage on the river's bank. Some day I hope we may meet again.

## Chapter XV

### THE AMUR—SMOKING CLIFFS

EARLY on Thursday morning, June 19, we reached Pokrovskaya, a village on the banks of the Amur, just where the Shilka joins it. The word "Pokrovskaya" is one that I shall never forget, for it was on everybody's lips from the moment they stepped on to the barge till the moment they left it. It was always "At Pokrovskaya we shall change into a steamer"; "At Pokrovskaya the river will be wider"; or, "After Pokrovskaya we shall get food that we can eat," and so on.

The day had begun with a mist all round us, so thick that we could hardly see the banks of the river, but it cleared up as the sun began to shine and the weather became hot and sultry.

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The water in the Shilka was so shallow that there was a delay of several hours before we could come alongside of the steamer for Blagovestchensk. For our comfort we were told that the boat which preceded ours had been delayed for want of water for three whole days at that very spot. A gentleman who followed in our track a week later informed me when he caught us up that matters had grown worse after we had passed through.

"There is only a foot and a half of water in the Shilka now," he said.

It was 11 a.m. when we changed into the steamer. The sun's rays were cruel as we crossed the bridge of planks that had been laid down for our benefit. How can I describe the scene? Passengers from the steamer were as anxious to secure places on the barge as we were to leave it. Both parties made a rush for the bridge and met in the middle. Then it became a case of "dodge past who can." Third-class passengers carrying their own bedding squeezed past porters carrying the baggage of other people, whilst solitary

## THE AMUR—SMOKING CLIFFS

individuals, who had neither bedding nor baggage to hinder them, ducked between. Everybody was afraid that everybody else would secure the best place. That was the trouble. However there was plenty of room for all who wished to travel first class. There was a pleasant saloon across the prow, and a passage running down the centre of the ship opened into the middle of it. Cabins, each containing two wide berths, opened into the passage on both sides. The other end of the passage led up some steps to a higher deck, and here was a buffet where you could buy wine, beer or lemonade at any hour of the day.

The previous passengers had not yet moved their things out when we took possession of our cabin. On my berth was a large round bundle tied up in a rug. I leaned against it, for I was quite exhausted. All at once the door opened and a Russian officer bounced in. He looked anxiously from me to the bundle and from the bundle back to me, said a few words in Russian and disappeared. A few minutes passed. Then he came again and be-

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haved in the same way, but this time I told him in French that I could not understand Russian.

"Ah!" he said, speaking French now, "I only wanted you to be careful, because there is a loaded revolver just where you are sitting and I was afraid it might go off. I will take it away as soon as I have had my lunch."

As he spoke he rolled the bundle aside and showed me a large revolver. After that I rested on my mother's berth until the other passengers had removed their baggage.

The steamer lay there all day till 6 p.m.

"We shall be six days late," said the director's wife in tones of despair. "We are going to tug that great barge which you see being loaded. I telegraphed to my husband to meet us on Friday, but we shall not get to Blagoves-tchensk before Sunday now," and then she added still more emphatically, "I blush for the impunctuality of my country. Yes—I blush for Russia." But she did not blush for all that.

A number of peasant women, who were



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evidently going only a short distance, got into the barge just before we started and stood together in a closely packed crowd. Every one of them had a brightly coloured cotton handkerchief tied over her head, and there were hardly two shades alike. Red, pink, yellow, orange, blue and green—all were there.

“Look at that bunch of flowers,” said one of our passengers as we watched them from the upper deck. And truly the comparison was not a bad one.

My memory of that day at Pokrovskaya is anything but pleasant. We had to fan ourselves incessantly to keep off swarms of those horrible green-faced flies. One pricked my hand while I was pouring out tea, and the pain was so sharp that I dropped the teapot. A gentleman who came into the saloon a minute later was quietly filling his glass with boiling water from the samovar when he suddenly gave a frantic jump and only just escaped a severe scalding.

The Amur is not a wide river as compared with the Yenisei or the Angara, and there is

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not much that is remarkable about its scenery after the first few miles. For hours together we saw nothing but undulating hills covered thickly with fir-trees. These would often change after a time to green pasture land without a sign of human life to relieve the monotony.

“Which side is China?” said my mother as she came on deck. “I want to sit with my face towards China so that I can see as much of it as possible.”

So we turned our chairs to the right and gazed upon the Chinese frontier.

Here, as on the railway, we experienced great changes of weather and of temperature. The intense heat of the first day was followed by autumnal cold and heavy rain. The very sailors we had seen at their posts in cotton blouses were now going about in fur-lined ulsters.

During the day there was always a sailor at the prow with a measuring pole. He called out the depth in a sing-song tone as he dropped the pole into the water and drew it out

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again. There were so many sand-banks and small islands that it would have been impossible to proceed by night. Happily for us we continued to have plenty of water.

Here and there we passed a scattered Cossack village and stopped to take the letters of the priest, the schoolmaster, or the doctor, if there was one. The people themselves could neither read nor write. It was a pretty sight to see women and children hastening to the bank in their coloured dresses with bottles of milk in their hands; the milk was eagerly bought by the passengers, especially by those of the third class who carried their own food with them and were glad to replenish their stores. First-class passengers paid two roubles a day per head for meals provided on board, and there was always a flourishing business carried on at the buffet.

There were few signs of life on the Chinese frontier. Sometimes however we passed close enough to a village to distinguish the peculiar shape of the Manchurian houses, or the junk-like canoes tied up on the bank.

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On the second day we came to a part of the river called Tsagaïan, where there were sandy cliffs on both sides. The peculiarity of these cliffs was that smoke was curling out of their sides in many places. Something that looked like ashes had streamed out of the holes from which the smoke issued and lay in heaps on the yellow sand at the river's edge. I had heard that the phenomenon was caused by strata of ever-smouldering coal running through the cliffs; but, from a fellow passenger who had made a study of the matter, I gathered that the so-called "coal" was a layer of wood, the roots of ancient trees, and that its smouldering was brought about much in the same manner as that of a damp hay-stack in summer. The nearest village is also called Tsagaïan. The following account of this locality is so interesting that I cannot refrain from inserting it.

"At this spot the river bank rises abruptly like a steep wall to the height of two hundred and fifty feet. The whole of the top of this wall is covered with moss, and because of its



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resemblance to the closely shaven head of a Lama Manegr, it has received the name of Lama - Khadar which signifies the 'Lama's rock.'

"The locality which goes by the name of Tsagaïan (Tsag-aïan, i.e. White Mountain) is venerated as a holy place by all the races of the Amur, the Chinese included. It extends for a verst and a half from Lama Khadar and terminates with steep and overhanging rocks. The whole of the Tsagaïan is composed of yellow sandstone lying in horizontal strata, interspersed with strata of brownish coal which is in a state of perpetual combustion. Travelers on the Amur, who pass this spot at night, have before them a magnificent spectacle in the shape of these ever-burning cliffs."<sup>1</sup>

A few hours later we passed the mouth of the river Koumara opposite which there is a very steep rock with a stretch of level ground above. On this level ground stands a great cross decorated with iron and painted white. It bears a copper plate with the inscription,

<sup>1</sup> *Guide to the Great Siberian Railway.*



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*La force n'est pas dans la force, la force est dans l'amour.* The cross was erected by Baron Korf, the first Governor-General of the Upper Amur. The words above quoted were used by him on the occasion of the first meeting at Khabarovsk, "des gens compétants," who were making a special study of the country's needs. The cross, which is surrounded by a railing of cast-iron, can be distinguished at a distance of fifty versts.

At certain points the river curves round in a most remarkable manner. There are times when you see no opening in front of you at all. In one place our steamer twisted in and out between the rocks almost forming the figure 8; and it seemed that in another minute we should run ashore.

"We are completely shut in now," said the lady doctor, "but there must be an opening soon. Let us guess on which side it will be. I think we shall turn to the left."

We stood watching in silence for some minutes. All at once the steamer made an abrupt turn to the right.

## THE AMUR—SMOKING CLIFFS

“You see I was wrong,” said she. “It was really impossible to tell.”

The land here became two peninsulas, one of them belonged to Russia, for it was formed by the right bank. The other, formed by the left bank, was Chinese territory.



A POST HOUSE WHERE WE CHANGED HORSES.

## Chapter XVI

### A CHINESE GOLD MINE—RUSSIAN MINES—BLAGOVESTCHENSK

THE Russian territory stretching from the left bank of the Amur, as far north as the southern boundary of Yakutsk, is known as the Amur Province. In size it has been compared to Sweden, for its surface covers the same number of square miles. Its character is decidedly mountainous, some peaks in the north rise to a height of 7,000 feet above the sea level, and there are ravines with a depth of 2,000 feet. The mountains that are seen from the river are of no great height ; but they have the appearance of being gloomy and inaccessible. Thick forests of fir trees cover them so densely that one almost wonders how their branches have room to grow. The luxuriance of vegetation, so different from that of other regions through which we had

## A CHINESE GOLD MINE

passed, struck us very forcibly. Frequent rain-falls keep the country so green that it resembles the "Emerald Isle." In fact there is a great deal more rain than is wanted, and the dampness and moisture of the land are a drawback with which emigrants and settlers find it hard to cope. This state of things is caused by west winds which blow from the Pacific Ocean and carry water with them.

The mineral wealth of the Amur region is inexhaustible. Iron has been discovered in great quantities, yet up to the present day no mines have been worked. Coal too is abundant, and numerous seams of the very best quality have been found. But the precious metal which has already attracted the attention of all the world, and affected by its presence the very life of the country, is gold.

Of all the gold districts within the Russian Empire those of the Amur Province are second in importance only to those of the Urals in the amount of gold found in the sand of their rivers; and to those of Yakutsk in the wealth of metal in their mines.

## A RIBBON OF IRON

From mines discovered in 1866 in the river systems of Dyalinida and Oldoi, by an engineer of the name of Anossof, and worked by a company, 2,500 puds of gold were extracted during a period of twenty years. These mines were then abandoned by the company, but private individuals who had been in its service continued to work them, and are still able, after paying the wages of the miners, to reserve for themselves an annual amount of sixty puds.

The river Amur may be a natural boundary between two vast territories, and Russians may shoot across it, or vice versa, but for all that a description of the left bank is also a description of the right, especially as far as mineral wealth is concerned, and few people stop to consider their nationality when gold is in the question.

The power of attraction that this metal has for human beings is exemplified in the story of the Jeltughinsk mines on the Manchurian frontier, not far from Pokrovskaya. They were discovered in the year 1883, and before the close of 1885 they had attracted a population of 10,000





Boats going to the Gold Mine, on a tributary of the Amur.



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souls ! The sequel to the tale has its amusing side. Manchurian troops fell upon these greedy gold diggers the following year, and driving them away burnt up all the apparatus they had brought together.

The greater number of the workmen employed in the Amur mines are Russian peasants. About 2,500 are employed in the mines worked by the Upper Amur Company, the oldest company in existence. It exploits as many as ten mines a year. The work is done by means of open canals ; sand is carried to the washing machine in trucks placed upon rails, or by a kind of lift. Some of the machines are most elaborate ; there is a fine model of one in the museum at Khabárovsk.<sup>1</sup> The Company has its own steamboats and there is telegraphic communication between the various mines. In the neighbourhood there are churches, hospitals and two schools for the children of the miners. Other large companies have similar arrangements.

One point in favour of the Amur gold mines is that the gold lies near the surface and is conse-

<sup>1</sup> None of these are very modern.

## A RIBBON OF IRON

quently more easily obtained than that of other districts. It is often quite impossible to work the mines during the month of August owing to the fact that the soil is turned into mud by a superabundance of rain.

The Director's wife had spoken truly. We did not reach Blagovestchensk till Sunday morning. Blagovestchensk, or "The town with the swear name" as I have since heard it called, unrolled itself with tantalizing slowness to our impatient eyes. We were all on deck, and there was a mustering of field glasses. Six whole days had passed since we left Stretinsk. We might have crossed the Atlantic in that time. No wonder we were all impatient.

First came a few straggling "isbas" or peasants' huts, then some pleasant-looking villas, far apart, with their front windows looking out upon the river; then an avenue of trees, and finally several solid-looking business houses of red brick, and an hotel.

"You have missed the post steamer," was the first piece of news that greeted our ears, you will have to wait four days for the next.



## A CHINESE GOLD MINE

As there was now no need for hurry on our part we decided to let the other passengers land first. Accordingly we remained on deck and amused ourselves with watching them scramble ashore. A crowd of people had come down to meet their friends. The Director of the gymnasium was there, a fine old man in uniform, quite soldier-like in appearance, and a daughter who had married one of the masters of the school. The daughter was sobbing as if her heart would break, and all for joy. They pushed across the crowded bridge and made their way into the cabin, where the mother and her little boy were waiting for them, and a few minutes later we saw the child riding triumphantly on his father's shoulder as they all recrossed the bridge with beaming faces. It was a pretty scene, but ah ! how different it might have been. That mother, so happy now, had, as we heard from one to whom she had confessed it, actually meditated suicide when she thought her son was drowned that terrible night on the Shilka.

"I should have jumped overboard myself," she had said, "and left the English ladies to take my



## A RIBBON OF IRON

little one to his father. I have lost one son, and could not live through another sorrow like that."

One of the passengers who had landed now came back very kindly to tell us that we had no time to lose. "The captain has received orders to return at once to Pokrovskaya," he said.

Not wishing to see Pokrovskaya again so soon I hurried on land to find a porter. The bridge was still crowded with emigrants and their baggage, or *bundleage*, if I may be allowed to coin such a word. Returning with a porter I confronted an unhappy emigrant with a big bundle of family bedding under his left arm, and a kettle and an open purse in his right hand. As he tried to make his way through the throng tea began to pour out of the kettle and rouble notes to flutter out of the purse. I wish I could have taken a photograph of that poor man's face!

Having been advised to stay at the *Grand Hotel* we drove there at once, and were glad to find more comfortable quarters than we had dared to expect. The manager spoke English, French and German, besides Russian, but his

## A CHINESE GOLD MINE

English was shaky from want of use. We were told that the owner of the hotel, a young man residing in Paris, was worth two millions sterling, though some say that it is worked by a company. I have heard since that this hotel is famed all over Siberia as the best throughout the length and breadth of the land. It has not been open two years and is not mentioned in any guide book. The cooking would certainly have been excellent but for the fact that every dish tasted of bad butter. We tried eggs, but they were absolutely uneatable, and, worst of all, the bread was sour. If ever I meet that young man, "worth two millions sterling" I will talk to him about the ice creams and the coffee, for these were irreproachable.

It was now three weeks since we had left Irkutsk. As we had been travelling with the post all the time no letters or newspapers had caught us up, and we literally thirsted for European news.<sup>1</sup> Early on Monday morning I

<sup>1</sup> In fact no letters did reach us till we got to New York, where we received some by way of the Atlantic. We had telegraphed to London from Vancouver.

## A RIBBON OF IRON

inquired for the manager, and asked him if there was any fresh news from South Africa.

“News from South Africa!” cried the manager, looking surprised. “Why, the papers have done with that part of the world; it’s all Russia and China now. There will be a war between the two countries as sure as fate.”

It was now my turn to be surprised.

“This must be something quite new,” I replied. “There was not even a rumour of such a thing when I left St. Petersburg.”

“Yes, it has all come about very quickly,” was the reply, and then we heard about the trouble in Pekin and Taku.

“There seem to be as many Chinamen as Russians in this town,” I remarked. “What will happen to them if there is a war?”

“The moment war is declared they will all have to leave,” he replied, “every one of them.”<sup>1</sup>

After this conversation I took a walk in the town, and made one or two purchases. Most of the people I met in the shops and in the streets were Chinamen—that is, Manchus. Many of

<sup>1</sup> They numbered more than 6,000.

## A CHINESE GOLD MINE

them carried poles balanced across their shoulders with swinging baskets of vegetables or fruits, just as you see them in Chinese pictures. I had never seen so many of the yellow race in my life, and was much interested in studying their faces as they passed me. They struck me as being very ugly indeed. I tried to feel kindly towards them, and even went so far as to picture myself a missionary in a Chinese town. But it was no use. I returned to the hotel with a feeling of thankfulness that I was not a missionary, at least not to so unattractive a people. Alas! at that very hour hundreds of poor missionaries in China were escaping for their lives, while many others were being cruelly murdered; and, what is more, the days of many a Manchu into whose face I looked that morning, were numbered.

The force and brilliancy with which the sun shone reminded me of the tropics. I returned to the hotel in a state of exhaustion, although it was not yet ten o'clock in the morning, and did not venture out again till the evening. In the night rain poured down in torrents, but the next



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morning the sun's rays were as fierce as ever. I believe that the great clearness of the atmosphere had much to do with the peculiar effect of the sun.

That evening we sat in the dining hall of the hotel reading the papers and watching the people who came and went. Presently a party of Russians and a Chinaman came in; they ordered beer, and sat down. The Chinaman was evidently of high rank. He was beautifully dressed and looked fat and sleek. Every time they raised their glasses to their lips the whole party got up, bowed, and shook hands. The Chinaman looked across at us occasionally as much as to say, "I wonder what those foreign ladies think of it all."

The next morning I was surprised to find *The Life of Tennyson* for sale in a book shop close by. It seemed strange that they should have English books for sale if there was no one to read them.

The chief occupation of the place is gold mining. Men who have made a little money at the mines in summer come to Blagovestchensk





Gold washing, near the Amur.



## A CHINESE GOLD MINE

to spend it during the winter. They come with the determination to have a good time, and spend their money very freely. But for such people the shops would not flourish as they do, for there is practically no one else to buy.

On Wednesday I was utterly incapacitated owing to the heat and the food. I remained in my room till about 3 p.m., when the manager suddenly appeared at the door.

"May I come in?" he asked, and before we could answer in he walked.

"You will be obliged to stay here, ladies," he said, in excited tones. "War has broken out, and all the steamers except the 'post' have been chartered to carry soldiers to the seat of action. All the horses are being taken. I doubt if you will find one to take you to the boat. If you do go on under the present state of affairs you will run the risk of being shot at, if not stopped altogether. Take my advice and make up your minds to wait here until the war is over. It will all be finished in a month, and then you can go on in safety."

"But the Chinese have not begun to go," I

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said ; " there are as many of them in the streets today as there were yesterday."

The manager shook his head. "Mark my word," he said. "In three days' time there will not be a Chinaman left in Blagovestchensk. Only twenty versts from here there is a Chinese army of 30,000 men. But the Russians are ready for them ; they will be the first to strike."

As soon as the manager had left us I drank a glass of strong tea to settle my nerves. My mother had not caught the whole of the conversation, as we had spoken in German. It was quite clear that Russian troops were being mobilized. We could see that with our own eyes from the window.

In the dining hall I found groups of people talking earnestly in low tones. The townspeople, I gathered, were under the impression that Russia was about to surprise and take by storm a Chinese town called Aigun, situated on the banks of the Amur, only twenty versts from Blagovestchensk.

## Chapter XVII

### THE SILVER GENERAL

WE had been planning a trip to Aïgun, as the most profitable way of passing the time till we could get a steamer to carry us farther; but the thought of meeting thirty thousand Chinamen in arms was not attractive.

"Let us go to the office of the Amur Company and see if they confirm these rumours," said my mother.

It had again been raining heavily, and the street in front of the hotel was completely flooded. Leroy-Beaulieu tells of a cow having been drowned in front of a gentleman's house.<sup>1</sup> I am inclined to believe that the scene of that

<sup>1</sup> *La Renovation de l'Asie.*



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tragedy was Blagovestchensk. It required a good deal of nerve on our part to drive through the water in a droshky.

We were shown into a room full of clerks sitting at desks. They were all mounted on high stools. Lo and behold! the first face that caught my eye was no other than that of the happy bridegroom with the uncombed hair! We had "run him to ground," as an American lady remarked when I told her the story.

"Is there any one here who can speak French or German?" we asked. There was rather a sheepish look on the bridegroom's face; he could only speak Russian, so remained silent.

"Can I assist you?" asked a gentleman who was standing there in a long coat and a wide-awake. As he spoke he came forward and took off his hat. One glance told us that he was an actor. His head was a mass of tight little curls. His features, his bright twinkling eyes and his every gesture reminded us of the stage. Hearing what we wanted, this gentleman came with us to the manager's private office, and was kind enough to act as interpreter.

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The manager remembered having travelled on the express with us as far as Omsk. He came forward and shook hands. My mother at once inquired sympathetically after the Mayor of Vladivostok and his broken ribs.

"He was much better when we parted," said M. Letchetsky smiling. "I think his ribs are all right now."

We spoke about the rumours we had heard, and asked if war *had* been declared between Russia and China.

"We know nothing," replied our friend, "it is impossible to tell."

"Is it true that all the horses are being taken to fight the Boxers?" we asked; "and is it true that there will not be a horse left to bring our droshky to the steamer?"

"It is true that all the horses of any value are being taken," replied M. Letchetsky; "but, though I cannot promise you a good horse, there will be plenty of decrepit ones left."

The actor came out with us and gallantly helped us into our droshky, after which he stood, hat in hand, till we were out of sight.

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We spent the rest of that day at the house of the military governor, General Gribsky. Madame Gribsky was away in Moscow, but the daughter made an excellent hostess in her mother's absence. As for the general, he was, in truth, one of the handsomest men we had seen for a long time. I can see him now, with his fine martial figure, his silvery hair, his patriarchal beard and eyes that shone with kindly feeling from under his dark expressive eyebrows. How I wish that our English writers who describe the Russian commanders as men with harsh stern faces—who live for war and show no mercy—could meet with a few men like General Gribsky!

"Some years ago," said Mademoiselle Gribsky, as we were speaking about her father, "when we lived in Warsaw, my father used to wear a uniform with silver facings, and the governor used to call him 'my silver general.' His hair turned grey when he was quite a young man."

The governor's house is a charming old place, with as many as twenty-five good-sized rooms all on the ground floor and opening into one

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another. A new house is very soon to take the place of the old one. Better built it will be, no doubt, but it can hardly be more picturesque.

The pretty garden runs right down to the river bank, and the verandah built on to the back of the house overlooks both, so that one can see right away into Manchuria.

After tea Mademoiselle Gribsky took us for a drive to see first the town and then the soldiers' quarters. The coachman on the box was a Cossack, with a black velvet waistcoat and full sleeves of bright orange yellow, with a sash to match.

One of the houses that attracted our attention was that of a wealthy Chinaman; it was very large and built of red brick. In one of the upper windows sat a Chinese lady, busily sewing. This was the wife, a lady with tiny feet, who never allowed herself to be seen in the streets, we were told.

The soldiers' quarters stretched out along the river side for quite a long distance. They formed a little town by themselves. There were pleasant looking summer quarters too, built



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amongst thickly growing oak trees, little villas for the married officers, a nice club house and a church. The different regiments had their respective flags stuck in the ground, with soldiers told off to guard them day and night. The soldiers stood with shouldered bayonets, and their faces were turned towards the Chinese frontier. A number of cannon also pointed in the same direction. Farther on still an artillery regiment, lately sent from Russia, had camped out in tents. At the door of one tent there were signs of merriment—some one was playing the banjo, and we caught a glimpse of a soldier inside dancing a sort of jig. As the Governor's carriage passed by laughing faces became serious, and we were respectfully saluted. We drove on till we came to the monument of Count Moravioff Amoursky. It had a railing round it, enclosing a piece of ground on which tall grass was growing. Thick-leaved oak trees grew on three sides of the monument, while the fourth faced the river. There was a cuckoo in the lower branches of one of the nearest trees as we approached. Instead of flying away it



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remained where it was and called out "Cuckoo ! cuckoo !" I had never seen one of these birds so close before.

The monument stands on the very spot where the count's horse stood as he proclaimed to his soldiers the joyful news that the Amur province had become Russian ground. It was on May 31, 1858, that Count Moravioff arrived at the military post station of Oust-Zeisk, at the confluence of the Amur and the Zeia, and sent word home to the Emperor of the treaty that had been concluded at Aïgun between China and Russia. That very day Archbishop Innocent laid the foundation stone of a church in honour of the Virgin Mary, and the station of Oust-Zeisk received a name which no Englishman will ever be able to pronounce, the name of Blagovestchensk. I am told that this unpronounceable word means "good news."

"Comrades !" cried the count, "I congratulate you. It is not in vain that we have worked so hard. The Amur belongs to Russia ! May the holy orthodox Church pray for you. You have the thanks of your country. Long live our

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Emperor Alexander II, and may the new territory prosper under his protection. Hurrah !”

Count Moravioff died in Paris, but his body is eventually to be buried on this spot. We drove on and on, beyond the garrison and beyond the monument, till we came to some stone quarries on the hillside. These were being worked by Chinese quarrymen. They had little fires on the ledges of the cliffs, and some were cooking food. They were only semi-clad, and looked like savages in the gathering twilight.

“So few people come out here to disturb them,” said Mademoiselle Gribsky, “that they often discard clothing altogether in hot weather.”

The situation of Blagovestchensk, so close to two navigable rivers, has been most favourable to its growth. Manchus came across in great numbers and helped to people the place, while emigrants and Cossacks formed the bulk of the Russian population. After the year 1880 there were rapid changes. Gold mines in the neighbourhood were exploited, and another class of men was attracted. There is no beauty about the town. It has very few trees besides a

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pleasant avenue along the river side, and the Governor's garden is the only one worthy of the name. The shops are good and the prices reasonable. Kunst and Albers, the Hamburg merchants, have one of their branch establishments here, and I have heard that they supply the ladies of the town with the latest Paris fashions brought from San Francisco. Their latest novelty while we were there was a "chapeau boer," with a long feather trailing behind.

Returning to the Governor's house we sat in the balcony till it grew dark, and were joined by the Vice-Governor with his wife and two nice little children. Some other little girls came in later. They were prettily dressed in pink, with light straw hats, and played amongst the trees in the garden like butterflies. All the children were devoted to the General; they ran up to him as trustingly as if he had been their own father. The Vice-Governor's little daughter had lately returned with her mother from St. Petersburg. "The child gave me no trouble," said her mother. "When it was hot and she

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complained of thirst I had only to say, "Mother is thirsty too, dear," and she never complained any more.

There was something fascinating to us about the fact that we were sitting within a few yards of Chinese soil. While turning over some photographs in a shop that morning I had come across one of the Governor of Aïgun.

"That button on his cap is a sign of his rank," said the man. He did not himself think the picture of any interest, and seemed surprised when I said I would buy it. How little either of us dreamed that Aïgun would be burned to the ground before three weeks were over! But so it was.

As we sat in the verandah looking across the water, Mademoiselle Gribsky gave us an interesting account of a visit that she and her father had paid to Aïgun.

"We were there several days," she said. "I took notes of many curious Chinese customs during that time. They entertained us with wonderful dishes," she continued, "and put chop-sticks before us instead of knives and



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forks. Of course I could not eat anything, much as I should have liked to please the Chinese Governor by so doing. Think of it—one dish was composed of worms, quite ordinary ones, but most tastefully arranged.”

All at once our conversation was interrupted by a sound of bugle notes across the river.

“The Chinese soldiers wish us to know that they are there,” said the Vice-Governor. “They have been treating us to that music four times during the night for the last three weeks, and it was our soldiers who gave them their music lessons,” he added with a smile.

At dinner we noticed that General Gribsky was in excellent spirits in spite of the fact that his night’s rest had been spoiled by the arrival of telegrams at all hours.

We were halfway through dinner when a marine officer from St. Petersburg joined us. He had been out to Vladivostok with M. Iswolsky’s party and was on his return journey, when he received orders to stop at Blagovestchensk and superintend the shipping of soldiers for Taku. All were merry as could



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be, and Prince D—— began chaffing the ladies present on their admiration—as he called it—of the Chinese officials. He put up his hand and made a sign of cutting off his head.

“I don’t understand Russian,” I said. “Pray what is all this fun about?”

“There is a very handsome Chinaman,” said Prince D——, turning to me and speaking in English, “who often comes to see General Gribsky on political business, and the ladies here admire him so much that I think it high time his head was off.”

Here all the ladies protested in a chorus, but to no purpose.

The next morning, when Prince D—— called on us at our hotel, he told us that before retiring to rest on the previous night he had received a document drawn up with all formality and sealed with the Governor’s seal, to the effect that not a single Chinese head was to be cut off.

“I was not going to be done by the ladies in this manner,” he said. “I sent one of my sailors to a barber’s shop for a Chinese pigtail

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—the largest he could find. When it came I had it done up in a parcel and sent a servant with it to Mademoiselle Gribsky. "Put it in the young lady's hand yourself," I said, "but do not betray the sender."

We all three laughed heartily over the joke, and wondered what the sequel would be. In the afternoon Mademoiselle Gribsky came down to the steamer to see us off.

"Oh!" she said, "I had such a fright this morning. A parcel was put into my hand by a man I had never seen before, and he left me without a word of explanation. I found no writing on it, and felt sure it contained some explosive, and had been sent by the Boxers."

"Did you open it?" we asked eagerly.

"Yes," she said, "I did muster courage at last, and what do you think I found?—A horrible Chinese pigtail!"

"You don't seem to appreciate your present," I said. "Give it me for my museum in London."

"No, indeed! I shall keep it for ever!" was the laughing reply.

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I have often wondered since whether that handsome Chinaman escaped with his life.

As we were steaming down the Amur I took the photograph and wrote on the back, "*Governor of Aïgun, Chinese town on the Amur.*"

Today there is no Aïgun, and no Governor!

## Chapter XVIII

### AÏGUN

“SO you will write an account of your journey,” said Prince D—— just as we were starting for Khabárovsk. “Well, if you take my advice, you will believe nothing that is not confirmed in St. Petersburg, otherwise your book will be full of travellers’ mistakes. One Siberian traveller describes the delightful shade afforded by—a plant which never grows more than a foot above the ground! Another tells us that a certain kind of dog peculiar to some parts is called *Sobaka*—blissfully ignorant of the fact that this word is not the name of a special breed, but the ordinary equivalent for the English word “dog.”

Just as our steamer was starting, the manager of the *Grand Hotel* came down to the wharf

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with a letter which he had written to his little daughters in Yokohama.

“I shall be so grateful, ladies,” he said with tears in his eyes, “if you can find time to go and see the children. They are in a convent school on the Bluff. Their mother has just taken the youngest there, and the eldest I have not seen for seven years. The separation is becoming unbearable, but what can I do? Blagovestchensk is no place for little girls. The climate, and the tone of the place—all is against them.”

We took the letter and promised to do our best.

The steamer on which we now travelled was certainly the finest we had yet seen. There was a pleasant dining saloon with cabins opening into it on both sides, and another saloon at one end, with plenty of comfortable easy chairs and a piano.

As the people began to come on board we noticed the faces of many passengers who had travelled with us as far as Stretinsk, and then disappeared from our view. The actor with



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short curls was there also, and the brown-coated priest with long ones.

"Where have all these people come from?" I asked, as the actor came up smiling.

"They arrived on the *Ural* yesterday morning," replied the actor. "I also came on the *Ural*; we had just arrived when you saw me in the office yesterday. We started from Stretinsk two days and a half before you, and got here three days later. Do you not remember seeing us walking on the river side when the *Ural* was stuck on a sandbank?"

One and another now came up, all smiles as they recognized the English ladies.

"You have become famous," said one.

"So you are going to the island of Sakhalin!" said another.

"I am glad you like Siberia," said a third. Then, seeing us look perplexed, they told us that an article about us had been published in the *Amur Gazette* the day before. One gentleman fetched his copy and translated part of it to us. We kept it as a memento; but it was not till October, four months later, that we got

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it translated. The translation is literal, and runs as follows :—

“Two English ladies, a mother sixty years old, with her young daughter, travel on board a steamer leaving Blagovestchensk. Both passengers have accomplished a long journey across Russia for instruction’s sake only, having visited Tashkent and the Caucasus, and being now on their way to the island of Sakhalin, wishing evidently to have the personal experience and feel the charms of our ways of transportation.

“Leaving Sakhalin they will probably visit Vladivostok, and then proceed to England, thus finishing their journey around the old world. Having crossed a good part of Siberia the ladies are surprised at our civilization and culture, and say that they never expected to meet with such good order in this distant borderland.

“But two years ago they had read in a book that bears were freely walking in the streets of Moscow.

“In reply to the inquisitiveness of some of their fellow passengers, who wished to ascertain whether the motive of their journey was the collection of ethnographical materials regarding

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the Russians, the Miss stated modestly that her mother was taking a few notes for her editor in London."

It was too hot to be on deck, but we would not go in till we were fairly off, as we were anxious to get a good view of Sakhalin, a Manchurian village situated exactly opposite Blagovestchensk, on the river bank. From this village begins the Chinese road that passes through the valley of Aïgun, and then leaving the river, branches off into the interior of Manchuria in the direction of Tsitsikar.

Twenty versts farther on we passed Aïgun. The river was much wider at this point, and our steamer kept well to mid-stream to avoid dangerous sandbanks, so that our view of the place was a distant one. Still we could make out the Chinese roofs. We saw here and there a roof raised as it were on four posts above the lower part of a dwelling, and its corners curled up outwards just as one sees them in Chinese pictures. There was not a sign of life stirring as we passed, and we laughed to think of all the rumours we had heard, and felt very

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glad we had not allowed ourselves to be frightened into staying at Blagovestchensk.

The latest and most authentic description of Aïgun that has been published is as follows <sup>1</sup>:—

“The town has a citadel which is the residence of a Chinese governor; the admiralty of a Chinese flotilla is also to be found here. The houses (*phanzas*) are of one story; they are small, and built either of brick or of clay, with thatched roofs. There are upwards of fifteen thousand inhabitants, some of whom are Mussulmen, these have a mosque and a school of their own. The chief commercial products are wheat, mustard, tobacco and oil.”

We had expected this to be the hottest part of our journey, but it was, on the contrary, delightfully cool and fresh, for we had no sooner passed Aïgun than there was a violent thunderstorm with pouring rain. At night, when we lay at anchor, swarms of tiny flies began to flutter round us. They had transparent white wings and pale green bodies, so small that when they were flying one could only see their wings,

<sup>1</sup> *Guide to Great Siberian Railway.*





Village of Sakhalin, after it had been burnt.





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and when we put out our hands to ward them off, it was like brushing away so much chaff.

Firs and larches still continued to cover the hillsides, and there was very little alteration in the scenery, though we descried several new kinds of flowers. There was one that looked like a peony ; it had large white petals fringed with pink, and grew in quantities close to the water's edge. At some of the landing stages, peasants brought bunches on board for sale. A Russian lady, seeing that I was interested in them, purchased a lovely bouquet and begged my acceptance of it.

This was only one of the many graceful acts of courtesy which the presence of foreign ladies called forth, and it is impossible to relate half the little kindnesses of which we were the recipients during that long Siberian journey. I remember one lady bringing to our cabin a plate of preserved pineapple ; she had bought it for us at the buffet, thinking that we might not know how to ask for such a delicacy in Russian. I need hardly add that her surmise was correct. On another occasion an officer, at a spot where

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fresh caviar was obtainable, ordered a dish to be set before us, and absolutely refused to let us pay for it.

Most of the first-class passengers were officers in white uniform with gold buttons. There was also a gaily dressed lady, whose home was at Khabarovsk. She told us that she knew St. Petersburg, Moscow, and many other fine cities, but that, for her part, she preferred Khabarovsk to them all. Life there, she said, was so thoroughly gay.

"What is the chief amusement there?" I asked.

"Dancing," she replied. "We have any number of balls, and there are always plenty of partners."

"Yes," put in the actor, who was our interpreter, "there are more men than women, for the place is nothing but a garrison full of officers. There is certainly plenty of dancing, but nothing else."

His tone was sarcastic.

"You are very brave to take this journey," he said to me. "Nansen had a far better time

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of it, I assure you. As for me, I have an engagement in an opera at Vladivostok, but I shall need quite two days' rest before I can sing."

I thought two days a very moderate time for rest after such a five weeks' journey.

"I have just been reading the Russian translation of an English book," he continued. "I can't remember the name, but it is about a young abbot who was very religious. He fell in love with a beautiful young girl, and his love for her conflicted with his religion."

"Was the girl called 'Glory'?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied. "It is a fine tale and cleverly written, but the abbot was not quite right in the head, and his sentiments, on which the whole story turns, were those of a sick brain, not a healthy one. But all novels are like that nowadays," he added. "There is something abnormal and unhealthy in them all, which lessens the value of these so-called 'psychological studies.'"

Another passenger was a young student from a commercial college in Moscow. He was on

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his way home to Vladivostok for the summer holidays.

“As it takes me ten weeks there and back,” he said, “I can only go home once in three years; even now there is a railway. I shall only get a month with my people.”

This youth spoke French well. He often translated for our benefit the conversations of the officers at the other end of the table.

“They are talking about the Boxers,” he said one day. “According to the Blagovestchensk journals, the present trouble with China seems to have arisen through certain Manchurians having found some bones buried near the unfinished railway line. They at once flew into a rage, and declared that a Manchu had been murdered. They persisted in attributing the death of their supposed brother to Russian cruelty, and so the rebellion began. The Russian engineers explained to the natives that the bones found were not human at all, but those of a bear. In order to convince the Manchus of their folly, they had a bear killed and skinned. Then they laid its bones beside



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the ones in question, but still some were not convinced."

We were three days and three nights traveling from Blagovestchensk to Khabarovsk. On the third day we passed the village Blagoslavenny; it is not a Russian, but a Corean village. In the year 1871 some Corean emigrants settled there; they had come from the Ussuri district, and, while they became members of the orthodox Church, retained their own language, their own way of life, and their own system of agriculture.

The appearance of this village is different from that of the Russian ones. Its houses are small—*phanzas*—all separated from one another by little plots of cultivated ground. Between the trees are narrow roadways. The houses are built with plaited branches of trees, and covered over inside and out with clay. Each *phanza* is surrounded by a little courtyard and out-houses. Everything is kept beautifully clean and in the best of order. The Coreans cultivate their fields with great care, and are most successful with all kinds of vegetables. Amongst

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the cereals they cultivate are millet, wheat, oats and maize. Owing to their great industry and thrift these people make enough money to live in comparative comfort, though the land allotted to them is not extensive.

The village of Mokhanko, which we passed a few hours later, is just opposite the spot where the river Sungari joins the Amur. Here there are numerous islands formed by collections of alluvial soil, thrown up where the waters meet. Some of them are bare, others are covered with vegetation. Instead of extending in the direction of the current, as one would expect, they spread across the river. This phenomenon is attributed to the fact that the waters of the Sungari flow with greater force than those of the Amur. The Manchus consider the Sungari to be the largest branch of the Amur; in fact, the Sungari has more water than the Amur, and steamers travelling on it are not obliged to anchor at night, which means a great economy of time. The water of the Sungari looks muddy. This is owing to infinitesimal particles of clay that are mixed up with it. For some distance

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the two currents run side by side, but the Amur eventually loses its clearness and becomes muddy like its companion.

No less than sixty-three kinds of fish have been found in the Amur, and there are probably many more. Carp and salmon are there in such abundance, that supplying the markets with them bids fair to become an important industry at no very distant date. One kind of salmon, *salmo proteus*, comes down the river in such shoals that no less than three thousand may be caught at a time. At Nikolaevsk upwards of a hundred and ninety-three thousand puds of a salmon called "keta"—*salmo lagocephalus*—are salted annually. It is for local markets only that they are so prepared at present. In addition to these, four million are dried in the sun, and five hundred and forty thousand are prepared as dogs' food.

## Chapter XIX

### KHABAROVSK—THE USSURI RAILWAY

**I**T was towards the close of the seventeenth century that the Amur province began to figure in the annals of Russian history. In the year 1643 a man named Basil Poiarkof was sent from Yakutsk with a company of one hundred and thirty Cossacks to explore its rivers. He travelled by boat as far as the mouth of the Amur, (having reached it by the Zeia), and returned to Yakutsk three years later without having left any trace of his expedition behind him.

A second expedition was set on foot in 1649 under Erothée Khabarof, who passed down the Amur and laid waste all the Daurian villages that lay in his way. The natives appealed to the Manchus for help, and this was the beginning of a long struggle between Russia and China for the possession of the Amur Province.



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I have already spoken of the bravery of the Cossacks. It was through their bravery, perseverance, and self-sacrifice that Russia was enabled finally to annex the Amur. They were the first emigrants, and the difficulties they had to encounter were almost insurmountable. The country was unknown to them, the forests were impenetrable, and the distances extreme. Both men and domestic animals fell victims to various maladies, and there was a terrible mortality among their children. Sometimes the river flooded its banks and destroyed the houses they had planted there with so much difficulty. "Many a brave Cossack died without a murmur," says a Russian writer. "History has passed them over in silence, poets have not sung their fame, but Russia knows to whom her thanks are due."

It was Count Moravioff Amoursky who immortalized the name of Khabarof by giving the name of that hardy Cossack to a military station which he established in the year 1858.

Khabarovsk is now a rapidly growing town perched on undulating hills that slope down to the water's edge just where the Amur is joined



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to the Ussuri. In the year 1893 its name, for some reason or other, was changed to Khabárovsk, and that is the name it goes by today. It is now the administrative centre of the Maritime Province, and the Governor-General resides there. The town is so essentially military in its character that it can hardly be called anything else but a garrison. There is a legend to the effect that its name ought by rights to be "The Town of the Seventeen Generals," for, says the legend, "since a Governor-General first settled there with his retinue—no one knows why—the place has never been of use to any one but Governor-Generals, and these have succeeded one another in quick succession." I do not myself think that there have been quite so many as seventeen, but legends always exaggerate.

The chief street is called "Moravioff Amour-sky," in memory of its founder, and there is also a monument in his honour which stands on the steep wooded cliff overlooking the river, and can be seen for a great distance.

One side of the cliff is bare and has huge boulders on its ledges. There is a sad story

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told in connection with one of them. A young lady, who was on a visit to some friends living near the cliff, put on her hat one afternoon and ran out to take a little stroll, saying, "I shall be back in half an hour." Her friends never saw her again alive, for a few minutes later a boulder, which must have been getting gradually loose for some time, rolled down the side of the cliff and crushed her to death. We heard about it from the Moscow student who had known the young lady intimately.

We had been told that there were no hotels in Khabarovsk, so we obtained permission from the agents to spend the night on the steamer that had brought us, and leaving our baggage in the cabin, we started off to see the Museum.

There were very few droshkies, and we had to walk up a steep hill before we could get one. Close to the landing-stage is a crescent of Chinese booths. Looking at the backs of them from the steamer we had wondered whatever those dilapidated wooden sheds could be; but when we reached the inner side of the crescent the sight was extremely picturesque. Every

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booth was well stocked with vegetables and other agricultural products, and a crowd of Manchus, all in bright blue, as I have described them elsewhere, stood eagerly waiting to sell their wares. These people, we found, all lived together in their own part of the town, where they were quite at home, and even had a Chinese temple to worship in. I was beginning now to get accustomed to the sight of their prominent cheek-bones and yellow skin, and my antipathy to them was not so strong as it had been.

The Museum door was locked, but we hunted up the old man who had charge of it and got him to show us round. Here we found a great deal to interest us, in spite of the fact that some of its rarest treasures had been sent to the Paris Exhibition. There were models of the various kinds of houses in which the different tribes of the Amur country pass their lives. Figures representing the men and women of each tribe were also there, with specimens of the food they live on and everything striking about them that could possibly be represented.

A large part of the Museum was set apart

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for similar models of Chinese and their houses, temples and gods, and even the Japanese were not forgotten. One of the Chinese articles of food was a kind of seaweed, in large bundles, of which the Celestials are very fond. Downstairs was a room devoted to stuffed seals of every kind and description, mostly from the island of Sakhalin and Kamschatka. The eye of the seal is known to resemble that of human beings, but I was never so much struck with this fact as on the present occasion. With the exception of the Government building, all the houses of Khabarovsk are of wood, and while there is one stone church there are two built of wood.

The present Governor-General, whose name has so often appeared in our papers of late, though hospitably inclined, is a bachelor, and his dinner parties are naturally less charming in the absence of the fair sex. The host is of a silent disposition they tell me, and after showing his hospitality by pointing to a dish and saying "Eat!—eat!" relapses into silence.

Returning to the wharf before dark we found a crowd of gaily dressed ladies and gentlemen



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who had come down to see their friends off. We made our way through them and went on board. But when we opened our cabin door there was no baggage to be seen! Our feelings were not pleasant. Very soon, however, consternation was turned to smiles, for we discovered that we were on another steamer, the very counterpart of our own. We had turned to retrace our steps when a new thought crossed our minds: "Perhaps ours had returned to Blagovestchensk with all our things on board!"

I made a rush for the agent's office. Alas! he could only speak Russian; but he soon understood our position, and pointing down the river, showed us our steamer safely anchored, and giving no signs of preparation for a return journey. The one we had mistaken for it was to start in half an hour for Blagovestchensk, after which ours was to return to the wharf, and we should be able to go on board for the night.

We fetched two chairs out of the office and sat down to contemplate the tender farewells that were taking place. Champagne was plenti-



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ful it seems on board, for the departing friends drank freely to the health of those they were leaving behind. Most of the people were bound for St. Petersburg, and this parting was no light matter. But for the champagne I fancy there would have been more tears visible.

Inside the low roof above our heads were several swallows' nests. Each nest was full of young birds which put their little heads over the side and twittered unceasingly while the parent birds fluttered round and fed them. The confidence of these little creatures was wonderful to see. The agent kept his eye on them and they seemed to know that they were under his protection. If an English cat had been there she would have had them all at a spring.

At last the steamer for Blagovestchensk moved slowly away, and handkerchiefs were waved furiously. Then our steamer came alongside, and we went on board to find our baggage safe, and everything just as we had left it. We spent the rest of the evening walking on the deck and listening to the band that was playing in the public gardens.

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All at once a swarm of flies came across from the wharf and covered the deck. They were the white kind I have already referred to with wings like chaff. It was just as if a sackful of chaff had been scattered over us. I had to put a handkerchief to my face to prevent them from fluttering into my mouth and eyes.

The flies were followed by a sharp thunderstorm and heavy rain which drove them into the saloon. While we were at supper they flew into the candles on the table, and getting burnt, fell in heaps on the cloth. We had to move all the candles to one end to prevent their falling into the food we were eating.

We were just retiring to rest, the only passengers left, when a young man in ship's uniform came to tell us that we must be sure to get up at 3 a.m. if we stayed on board, as we should otherwise be taken back to Blagoveshtensk. The steamer was to start punctually at 4 a.m. He advised us strongly to go at once to an hotel, and promised to get us a droshky while we packed our things. When we heard that there really was an hotel to which we could go,

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we agreed to his proposal, and had just finished strapping up our rugs when the young man returned bringing with him one of the officers who had travelled with us. With some difficulty they made us understand that after all we could stay on the steamer if we preferred it. The first alarm had been a false one. They were not leaving till 6 a.m. Once more we unpacked for the night, for the idea of a droshky drive in that pelting rain was anything but agreeable.

Our train was to start for Vladivostok at 7 a.m., and it was a long drive to the station. I shall never forget the state of the roads : it was like driving over ploughed fields after rain.

At the station we recognized many familiar faces, amongst which were those of the brown-coated priest, the Moscow student and the actor. When people have been travelling together for weeks and weeks they meet more or less as old friends even if they have never exchanged a word.

As we walked up and down the platform we were struck with the great number of national-

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ities represented on it. Coreans dressed all in white with strange white headdresses, that made a striking contrast to their jet-black hair and dark yellow skins, were squatting on the ground in rows. Servian gipsies were walking about amongst the crowd and telling fortunes; Chinese and Japs were everywhere. One well-dressed Chinese lady stood quietly by the ticket office while her husband got the tickets. How she could balance herself on her tiny feet was a mystery.

There was a Circassian family from Tiflis all very good looking. The beautiful mother wore her thick black hair down her back in long natural curls, while on her head was a velvet cap, covered with a lace handkerchief which floated over her shoulders. Her handsome son-in-law was a priest. He had a bush of curly black hair and wore a long grey coat with loose sleeves. It was lined with bright purple silk.

The express train by which we travelled to Vladivostok was not so luxurious as the "train de luxe" by which we had travelled to Omsk. It was like an ordinary post train with a rough



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kind of dining car attached. At one end of the dining car was a buffet behind which stood two Jap boys always alert for orders. Down the middle ran a long table which was occupied half the time by passengers drinking beer.

I observed that the train seemed to be managed by soldiers rather than by the usual railway men, and that the stations were many of them quite military in appearance; whereupon I was told that this was because in time of war the Ussuri railway would become a military one, and it was necessary that the soldiers should have some practice in the management of it. Both at Khabarovsk and at Viasemska stations there were barracks and a railway battalion.

The country through which we now passed was very beautiful. There were hills and valleys and meadows all following one another in quick succession. The grass in the meadows was high, and amongst it were many kinds of lovely flowers that we had never seen growing wild before.

We stayed in the dining car till all the passengers except ourselves had had their lunch



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and gone back to their respective carriages. Then we drew our chairs close to one of the windows and passed several delightful hours feasting our eyes on the scenery and looking out for all the new kinds of flowers that were to be seen. We got quite excited over it as we pointed out each fresh blossom to one another. There was the purple, and the white iris, such as we afterwards saw to greater perfection in Japan; there were big yellow, red, and white lilies such as grow in our gardens at home, and there was a brilliant red flower, with clusters of blossom not unlike our common geranium. Some one got out and picked a bunch of them at one of the stations, and as they were placed in a vase on the buffet table we were able to examine them more closely; their petals were firmer than those of the geranium, and more waxlike.

Later in the afternoon, when we were refreshing ourselves with coffee served in glasses, the first we had tasted for nearly a week, we made the acquaintance of a Russian officer who spoke English. He turned out to be a military agent. Colonel D—— was travelling with his adjutant,

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Lieutenant K——, and a Chinese servant. They had come by land from Port Arthur to Charbin in Manchuria, where they had crossed the unfinished railway and then proceeded by steamer down the Sungari to Khabarovsk.

“All was perfectly quiet,” said the Colonel, “when we left Port Arthur, and we preceded the rebellion in each town by a few hours. At Mukden there was not the faintest indication of the approaching trouble, but at the very next town we stopped at, news reached us by telegram that Mukden was in arms.”

“Things are looking very grave at Pekin,” he continued, “and if I may be allowed to criticize the action of the English, French and Germans in the matter, I would say that it is nothing short of impertinence to send a small handful of men to set things right in the very heart of a country so powerful in men and arms as China ! “I repeat it,” he cried, getting quite excited. “It is *impertinence*, and the Chinese will look upon it as such and act accordingly.”

That night we were, for the first time, attacked by mosquitoes. They were merciless.

## Chapter XX

### KHILKOVO—VLADIVOSTOK

OUR train was due at Vladivostok at 1 p.m. on the day following that on which we had left Khabarovsk, and at 12.30 we caught sight of the waters of the Amur Gulf, an arm of the Bay of Peter the Great. The train ran close to the water's edge and a delicious sea breeze blew in upon us. Then came the last station we had to pass—Khilkovo. I need hardly say that it had a special interest for us as having received its name in honour of our kind friend Prince Hilkoﬀ, the Minister of Ways and Communications. It was at this spot that the people of Vladivostok assembled to bid "God-speed" to their beloved Czarowich, the present Emperor, when in May, 1891, he started on his journey across Siberia.

We now found ourselves speeding through

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the very centre of Vladivostok. Hills sprinkled with houses rose on all sides of us. There is only one street of any length in the place and this we crossed over before reaching the station, which is situated on the eastern side of the beautiful bay called "The Bay of the Golden Horn." The latitude of Vladivostok is only a quarter of a degree further north than that of Florence and Nice, nevertheless it is ice-bound during several months of the year, and an ice-breaker has to be used in order to bring ships into the harbour. Our first view of the town was pleasing. Its semi-European houses seemed to spring up in the most unexpected places, while the bay of the Golden Horn curled itself round the undulating hills, and pretty boats on the water added life to the scene. This "Paris of Siberia," as it has been called, we found in a state of unusual stir and excitement, owing to the mobilization of its troops, not—as rumour had it—in preparation for war with China, but for the quieting of a rebellion which the Chinese government was itself unable to quell. Officers in full uniform were driving



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about in all directions and there was not a droshky to be had. Happily for us we had fallen into good hands. One new friend Colonel D—— ordered his Chinamen to look after our baggage, and sent some one else in search of a droshky.

In the meantime we sat in the waiting room and watched our fellow passengers dispersing on foot to their new homes, having finished at last their five weeks' journey. The actor was fat, and averse to walking; I felt quite sorry for him. As for the Moscow student, he was the picture of happiness, surrounded by father and mother and younger brothers and sisters. They were all brought up and introduced to us, whereupon we shook hands and agreed to meet again. Besides, as the young man was, like ourselves, to make the return journey in a few weeks' time, there seemed every probability that we might again be travelling companions.

The search for droshkies proved successful at last, and the faithful Chinaman packed our luggage into one of them. We had just got in ourselves and were commenting on the extreme



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youthfulness of the man on the box, who could not have been more than twelve years old, when the Colonel came up and insisted on our taking the other droshky.

“I will not trust you to that little boy,” he said, “especially as you cannot speak the language.”

The thought of being turned over at an angle of one of those hills, and not being able to make strong language understood, was too much for us. We got out meekly and did as we were told. At last we were off. I shall never forget that first drive in Vladivostok. It was nothing but a series of ups and downs and twists and turns. We blessed the Colonel for not trusting us to the little boy.

The manager of the *Moscow* came out to meet us with a telegram, which we had sent him from Khabarovsk, in his hand. I took it from him and nodded when I saw our name upon it. We had learned by this time to talk as easily by action and dumb show as people do who have been deprived of speech from their birth. If we wanted a key for our door we had

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only to imitate the action of turning a key, and so on. Gradually and almost unconsciously we had picked up the Russian for a few such words as were the most useful and at the same time the most difficult to describe by action.

We were shown into two fairly large rooms opening one into the other. The hotel stood on the side of a very steep road running up the hill from the chief street which skirted the water, and as our rooms were on the ground floor we had a good view of the bay.

All the work in the hotel was done by Chinamen. They moved about very quietly, and waited on us with a stately deference which pleased us much, though just at first they could not conceal their astonishment when they found us unable to speak either Russian or Chinese.

Early the next morning I started out to post our letters, and walked most of the way, not being able to find a droshky. Chinamen literally lined the streets on both sides. They wore their loose blue cotton jackets open in front, and exposed so much of their yellow chests

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to view that they gave one the idea of people reduced to the last extremity from heat and suffocation. The military element had practically disappeared, and, as a lady residing there told me afterwards, Vladivostok was not itself as I saw it.

“Now that all our gay officers are gone,” she added, “a stranger might well think that the town was in the hands of the Chinese.”

At the post office I found a woman who spoke French. She informed me that every steamer that came into the bay was chartered to take troops to Taku, and that there was no knowing when our letters would go.

After lunch Colonel D—— came to see us, also the Moscow student and his father. All were most kind, but the news they brought was not favourable.

“You cannot get a steamer to take you to Japan for ten days or even longer,” they said.

We knew well that a week longer in Vladivostok meant a week less in Japan, so the prospect of such a delay was extremely aggravating.

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"I am as anxious as you are to get to Japan," said the Colonel; "my people are there and I wish to see them before I join my regiment at Taku. If I find even a cargo boat that will take me I shall go."

"If you do find a cargo boat tell us," I cried, "for we will come too."

"Yes," said my mother. "We will come with you, and sleep on deck if there are no cabins."

The Colonel looked surprised, but he promised to do his best.

The Governor's house was only a few steps from the hotel, and that of the Mayor just opposite. When calling on Madame Tchitchagoff, the Governor's wife, we remarked a business-like green baize table in the centre of her elegant drawing room.

"That table does not belong here," said our hostess, following the direction of our eyes. "It was brought in this morning for my committee meeting. I have formed a committee of ladies to help me to take care of the wives and children of our soldiers who are being so hurriedly taken to China," and then she went on



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to tell us how, one after another the men kept coming to her with anxious faces to beg her to befriend the dear ones they were leaving.

“I am as busy as my husband,” she added smiling. “While he looks after the men and sends them to China I look after the women and children. You must come and lunch with me to morrow, and then you will meet my husband.”

That was an interesting lunch party, and one we shall never forget. I found myself sitting next to a closely-shaven military man of remarkably fine appearance; this was the Governor, General Tchitchagoff, resplendent in full uniform. He chatted gaily in French, and kept filling my plate with every delicacy, and pouring out wines which he never could have expected me to drink. I found wood strawberries, pineapple, and bananas all on my plate at once when we got to the dessert.

Opposite me sat Admiral A—— who was on his way to take command of the Russian forces at Taku. He talked little and was anxious to



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be off, so we hurried through the meal on his account. A man of war was waiting in the bay ready to start the moment he came on board, and General Tchitchagoff was to take him out in his own launch. Champagne was drunk in his honour, and every one wished him success in his undertaking.

Ten minutes before they started General L—— was announced. He had just arrived from Khabarovsk, and was going on at once with Admiral A——.

Two more glasses of champagne were brought. We were now sitting in the verandah overlooking the bay, and the ship that was to take the generals lay before our eyes. General Tchitchagoff carried the newcomer off to a quiet corner where they talked earnestly for a few minutes; afterwards they drank each other's health and rejoined us.

Every one tried to be gay those last moments, but there was an undercurrent of sadness felt by all. Those veteran warriors knew what war meant, and we English knew also—only too well.

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"So you have actually come through Siberia," said General L—— looking at us with interest; "right through Siberia! You are very brave!"

Then, as we rose to go, he shook hands heartily with all present except the Governor's wife, whose hand he gallantly kissed. In the meantime General Tchitchagoff, who had stepped into the garden, returned with a lovely rose and presented it to my mother. It was the first rose that had crossed our path in Siberia.

"I will keep it," said my mother, "in memory of the brave generals I have met today."

Madame Tchitchagoff brought out some field glasses, and we watched the launch with the three generals on board, as it made its way to the man of war. Then the great ship moved slowly away to join the allies at Taku.

"The soldiers are delighted to go," said one of the ladies.

"How is it men are so ready to face death?" I said, almost thinking aloud.

"On ne meurt qu'une fois," replied Madame Tchitchagoff.

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Afterwards, as we were walking in their lovely garden, Mademoiselle Tchitchagoff described how, with her mother and sisters, she also had come through Siberia.

“We travelled in winter,” she said. “It was delightful to skim over thousands of miles of untrodden snow, in a comfortable sledge, with the clear frosty air blowing in your face, and warm furs all round you.

“One of my sisters caught cold on the way,” she continued, “and as we could not keep her in a warm room we made her tuck her head under the cover till she got better. We took with us a cook, a dressmaker, and a maid, besides other attendants. At Irkutsk they did their best to make us comfortable by putting us all into one immense room for the night.” (Here she laughed heartily at the remembrance.) “The windows and doors were draped with the grandest of curtains,” she went on to say, “but it never entered the landlord’s head that we should have preferred separate rooms, however simple, to all that magnificence. As it was, we settled down with the help of a few screens, and

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left a corner to the cook, so that she was able to prepare our supper in comparative peace."

When Mademoiselle Tchitchagoff had finished, I told her about our journey, and the two accounts sounded so different that it was hard to believe that we had both travelled by one and the same route. A journey by sledge in winter is naturally very different from one by train in summer. Yet as we compared notes we came to the conclusion that the one was as pleasant and as enjoyable as the other.

Later on in the afternoon we called on the Mayor. His wife was an Englishwoman. She welcomed us kindly, and after we had chatted for a few minutes the Mayor himself came in. After mutual greetings he handed my mother a pair of pocket scissors she had left in the train at Omsk, thousands of miles away.

"These are trying times," said Madame V——; "nearly all the servants in the town are Chinese, and yesterday they all with one consent gave notice to leave. Some one spread a report that the Russians intended to shut them



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up in a large building, and put lighted kerosine underneath. Happily the Governor was able to persuade them that the report was false, otherwise I don't know what in the world we should have done. General Tchitchagoff sent for some of the most influential Chinese merchants," she continued, "and told them to try their powers of persuasion with the lower classes. He also told his own servants that they could find no safer place than his house, whatever complications might arise."

Another lady to whom I spoke about the Chinese servants told me that they were much more satisfactory than the Japs or Russians.

"To begin with," she said, "they are satisfied with lower wages, for their way of life is so simple; they have wonderful memories too. If you tell a Chinaman to place a chair in any particular part of the room he puts it there, not only when you give the command, but every day and always, till you give him further instructions. However," she added, "it is more a case of blind obedience than of thoughtful service."



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The history of Vladivostok dates from 1860. On June 20 in that year, a Russian man of war called the *Manchour*, under Lieutenant-Captain Chefner, brought into the bay a party of soldiers. On the spot where they landed they built themselves barracks, and the place became a military station. In 1861 the stone of the first church was laid, and in 1865 Vladivostok was declared a free port.

A Hamburg firm has a large store in the chief street—"a place where you can buy everything." Americans and French also do business there, but Russian merchants are scarce.

"We made a great mistake from the first," I heard a Russian say, "in not sending merchants here when we sent soldiers. Now, other countries are stepping in and taking the trade out of our hands."

When talking to the Mayor's wife I said, "Do you not feel a little nervous now that so many of the Russian soldiers are being sent away? Surely the Russian inhabitants would be helpless if this swarm of Chinamen rose in arms.

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Their numbers alone would be overpowering, and then too you are so close to China."

"I have lived here for the last twenty years," replied Madame V——, "and during the whole of that time we have been constantly preparing for a siege. Once we went so far as to get in special provisions; but here we are still you see!"

## Chapter XXI

### ON A CARGO BOAT—FALLEN FROM THE SKY—SAPPORO

*H*OTEL *Moscow* was full of people waiting like ourselves for a steamer to Nagasaki, the Japanese port to which, in times of peace, there is a regular and frequent service. We resigned ourselves to the inevitable. I arranged to pay some calls with Mademoiselle Tchitchagoff on the following day, accepted an invitation to supper with other friends, and sent our clothes to the Chinese laundry. In the evening Colonel D—— looked in.

“I have come to say ‘good-bye,’” he said. “I shall probably start either for Taku with the soldiers before daybreak, or cross to Otaru in the north of Japan by a cargo boat leaving at 9.30 a.m.”

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"If you go to Japan take us with you," we both cried in a breath.

The Colonel looked very much surprised this time.

"I fear there will be no accommodation for ladies," he replied, "and, besides, you would need Japanese money, and there is very little to be got here."

"Please take these," said my mother, handing him some rouble notes, "and secure our passages on the cargo boat. Once in Japan we will find some way of changing our money. If you don't come back this evening to say that the captain refuses to take us we shall consider it settled and be ready to go at 9 a.m. tomorrow."

"I will do my best," said the Colonel, and he hurried off. He did not return that evening, so we wrote notes of explanation to all our friends, promising to let them know when we returned.

At the appointed hour the following morning the Colonel appeared.

"I have taken your passages," he said, "and

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we shall be a party of six, including my Chinamen, for Lieut.-Colonel S—— of the Russian Legation at Tokio is coming too. He is impatient to be at his post, and asked permission to join our party directly he heard we had found a boat. The captain is going to let you have his own cabin, so you will not have to sleep on deck, and there is one other cabin into which we three men will squeeze. I have been all over the place trying to get Japanese money, but have only seventy 'yens.' That will not go far among so many people."

We then sent for the manager of the hotel and got the Colonel to tell him that he was to keep the things we had sent to the laundry till our return.

Just as we were starting, one of the ladies in the hotel, who spoke French, met me in the hall.

"I am off to Japan," I said.

"That cannot be, Mademoiselle," she replied. "I have been waiting to go myself for more than a week. There is no steamer going, I



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assure you, and what is more, there will not be one for nearly a fortnight," and she swept past me with her head in the air.

"If you don't see me again you will know I'm gone," I answered.

The chief of the police, who was a friend of Colonel D——'s, took us out to the boat in his own steam launch.

The captain of the *Erica* was a pleasant man and jolly, as most sea captains are. He came from Riga and spoke German and English.

"I hope you will excuse our rough ways," he said, shaking hands with my mother. "This does not profess to be a passenger ship you know."

We found ourselves the occupants of a comfortable cabin with two berths, over one of which was placed a framed motto worked by hand,

In allen Stürmen, in aller Noth,  
Mög' er dich beschirmen—der treue Gott.

Hanging from the ceiling was a cage with a canary, which sang sweetly. There was truly nothing more to be desired but a calm passage.

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The rest of our party came on board just before we started, and Lieut.-Colonel S—— was introduced to us. He proved a most agreeable addition, for he spoke French and was musical. In the evenings, as we sat watching the water in the bright moonlight, he and Lieutenant K—— sang Russian duets. He had brought a treasure with him in the shape of a *Murray's Guide to Japan*, in English, just the very book we wanted. After lunch the three gentlemen disappeared into their cabin and returned, one after the other, in civil attire. They chaffed one another without mercy, and we too smiled at the change that had been so speedily effected.

We studied the maps and found that we were to land in a little bay on the west coast of Hokkaido, the island which used to be called Yezo. What added romance to the whole was the fact that not a soul on board had ever been to Japan before. The captain had never seen even the coast of Japan when he received orders from head-quarters to fetch a cargo of coal from the mines of Otaru and take it to Singapore.

## A RIBBON OF IRON

"I had a narrow escape last night," said Colonel D—— as the shores of Siberia began to grow faint in the distance. "I had put my baggage on board the steamer for Taku, so went out late in the evening to fetch it back. I was very tired, for I had been scouring the town for Jap money, besides making many other necessary arrangements. I lay down on the berth that was to have been mine, intending to take a few minutes' rest, and fell fast asleep. At length the sound of military music awoke me at 4 a.m. The steamer had begun to move. I rushed on deck with my baggage and just had time to scramble into the last boat that was putting ashore. If I had slept a few minutes longer I should have been now on my way to Taku with your rouble notes in my pocket! Who knows how long it would have been before I could have let you know what had happened!"

We had left Vladivostok on Friday, July 6, and it was 7 p.m. on Sunday evening when we arrived at Otaru. As the captain did not know the rocks he would not approach land

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till daylight, so we anchored well outside the bay.

Before we were on deck the next day another steamer passed us and anchored inside the bay. This turned out to be one of a regular line between Hokkaido and Yokohama. After breakfast all of us, except my mother, went across to her in a little boat rowed by Jap boatmen.

We found the captain to be a genial Scotchman. He said he would be pleased to take us to Yokohama, but was not starting till Wednesday afternoon. He also told us that we must get our tickets at the agent's office in Otaru.

As we had two days and a half at our disposal we decided to see all we could of the northern Japs and their ways; we began by sending a Jap guide ahead to order us a native dinner. Then we fetched my mother, and all came ashore together, while the Chinese *boy* followed with cloaks and umbrellas. How we were to find the ticket office no one knew. As we were nearing the landing place we



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espied a group of Japanese men, amongst whom was a man in European clothes.

"It is an Englishman," said Colonel D——  
"He will be able to help us," and he asked my mother and me to go forward and speak to him.

"Good-morning," I said, approaching him.  
"Do you speak English?"

"*Rather*," replied the gentleman, lifting his hat. "I am an American missionary."

"Would you kindly tell us," said my mother, "how far it is to the ticket office?"

"About two blocks, M'am," replied the missionary.

"I am afraid I don't know how much a block is," said my mother.

"Well, it's about eight squares," was the reply.

"Pray, what is a square?" said my mother, and we both looked in the direction of the town. It was nothing but a mass of straggling houses. There was nothing square about it.

The three Russian officers who stood by were surprised to find us so slow to understand our own language; hearing the missionary reply



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in English they had thought our difficulties at an end.

“Would you mind coming with us?” I said at last, as the missionary seemed at a loss how to explain further.

“Not at all,” he replied. “I shall be glad to assist you in any way.”

“Allow me to introduce these gentlemen,” I said; “they are Russian officers on their way to Yokohama.”

“Ah! Russian officers,” said the missionary, shaking hands. “The Japanese were in a great state when they saw the Russian flag on your ship. You were very wise to come in civil dress.”

At the ticket office we had a long interview with the Jap agent, who was also in European dress, with gold spectacles. This gentleman refused to change any Russian money, but offered to let us have our tickets if we would pay a certain sum on each to him, and the rest to the purser on our arrival at Yokohama.

“That we cannot do,” said the Colonel, “we have only very little Japanese money with us,

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and we shall need it all here before starting." He was thinking of the Japanese dinner, to which we were all looking forward, but did not say so.

At last we decided to return to the *Erica* and consult our friend the captain.

As we were leaving the office the missionary, the Rev. R. Pearson, gave us his card and begged us to come to Sapporo, where he lived, the next day.

"The place is well worth seeing," he said; "my wife will be delighted to show you everything. She speaks French and German."

"Please tell the guide how to bring us, and by what train," I said, "for he hardly knows three words of any but his native tongue. Please tell him also to take us to a photographer's."

The guide listened attentively to all that Mr. Pearson told him, and then we parted.

Arrived at the photographer's we arranged ourselves into a group, and a little old man, looking almost as much like a monkey as a human being, took a photograph of our party.

## ON A CARGO BOAT—SAPPORO

How the captain laughed when we got back to the *Erica* and told him of our dilemma. "So you are not going to miss your Jap dinner," he said; "well, I can give you all the money you want."

That Jap dinner was a great success. We took off our shoes and sat on soft white matting round a very low table. The room had only three sides, the fourth opening into a veritable Jap garden.<sup>1</sup> Dainty Jap women served us on bended knee, and danced to us when we had finished our repast. The first course consisted of tiny plates of cherries. Then came a kind of fungus which few of us had courage to attack. Fish soup followed, then chickens boiled with peaches. There were a great many courses.

It was quite dark when we rowed back to the *Erica*; bright stars shone above us and danced upon the water, while the lights of the town twinkled to us from the shore.

<sup>1</sup> This garden, though very small, contained a miniature lake, upon the surface of which there floated a miniature steamer.

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The next day we reached Sapporo about 12.30, after a train journey of nearly three hours. Lunch over, Mr. and Mrs. Pearson took us to see all the points of interest. Not wishing to enter the museum on such a lovely day, we looked through the keyhole and saw some storks.

"There is a bear in there which swallowed a baby," said Mrs. Pearson. But even that did not tempt us.

Mrs. Pearson was a charming American full of life and fun.

"You could not have come upon us more unexpectedly if you had fallen from the skies," she said. "No travellers ever land at Otaru. Where *have* you come from?"

Her excitement increased when she heard that my mother and I had come through Siberia.

"Why we Americans think it a fair railway journey to cross the States," she said, "and that only takes five days. How I envy you!"

In the afternoon we visited some Ainu families. The Ainus are the original inhabitants of Japan. Once spreading all over the





Ainu Woman, with ingrain moustache.





## ON A CARGO BOAT—SAPPORO

country they are now only to be found in Hokkaido. The government has lately been trying to prevent their extinction. The men are terrible drunkards, and spend half their time in pouring libations to the gods. At the commencement of the ceremony they lift up their heavy moustaches with long sticks called "moustache lifters." The women have imitation moustaches, the result of careful tattooing with lead in infancy. Both the men and the women had a wild unkempt appearance. Their matted hair hung over their foreheads, and partially concealed their features, while there was a look in their eyes such as one sees in cases where the mind is slightly unhinged. The Rev. J. Bachelor, who has for the last twenty years devoted his life to these people, has published an interesting book about them. He has also prepared a grammar in their language and translated the New Testament.

As we were passing the church that has been built at Sapporo by the Church Missionary Society the Chinaman suddenly grew quite excited, and, turning to his master, the Colonel,

## A RIBBON OF IRON

said, "Look ! there is a saying of our Confucius inscribed above the door."

Mrs. Pearson was much disturbed that the words written on a Christian church should be taken for those of a heathen philosopher. She got out of her "rickshaw," and stopping a Jap student, who happened to be passing, asked him to explain the writing to the Chinaman. He did so, and the latter appeared convinced ; but on the way back to Otaru he said to the Colonel, "I know it was Confucius all the same."

The next morning we had to stay in our cabins to escape the coal dust with which the deck was black. Coal was being handed up the side of the ship in small covered baskets by women with white handkerchiefs tied round their heads and large mushroom hats on top. They seemed to enjoy their work, and laughed merrily all the time. Indeed, their peals of laughter were so contagious that we laughed too, and peeped out occasionally to see what it was all about.

The guide came on board about noon with the photograph of our group.

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“One of us forgot to do his hair,” said Colonel D—— as he examined it critically.

When we were leaving the *Erica* the captain said: “Ladies and gentlemen, it will be a long time before you see this boat again. I hope no one has left any property behind.”

I thought of this afterwards, when, on unpacking at Yokohama, I discovered that we had brought away a pair of the captain's boots, wrapped in paper just like ours. Poor man, he certainly never saw them again, for we gave them to a waiter at the *Oriental*. If the captain ever reads these lines I trust he will forgive.

On the steamer for Yokohama we might have had pleasure all the time, for here also the captain, a Scotchman, was pleasantness itself, and the first mate quite anxious to be agreeable. Added to this the deck chairs were luxurious. But, alas! we were now on the Pacific and it tossed us about most cruelly.

At Hakodate we were to have been delayed at least one day, but news from China was so threatening that the captain received orders

## A RIBBON OF IRON

to leave at once for Yokohama that he might take Japanese soldiers to Taku.

"So these gentlemen are going to the front," said Captain Campbell one calm day when we were all on deck together.

"Yes," I replied, "and we ladies shall not be far from the front ourselves, for we have ten days' travelling on the Chinese frontier to look forward to."

"You must write to each other and compare notes of your experiences," said the captain.

"Whoever lives to tell the tale must tell it," I replied.

We reached Yokohama on the 14th of July. Flags were flying and streamers fluttering in honour of the fête day. Arriving at the *Oriental Hotel*, we were told that in the evening there was to be a grand dinner there, and a dance, for which the best band in Japan had been brought from Tokio.

A few hours after our arrival my mother and I ordered "rickshaws" and called at the convent on the Bluff to see the daughters of the manager of the hotel at Blagovestchensk.





Photograph taken on landing at Otaru, North Japan.



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We found only one child. The mother and the younger one had not arrived, though they had left Blagovestchensk a week before us. They were still waiting in Vladivostok for a steamer.

Just as we were leaving the convent we met Colonel D—— and Lieutenant K——. They had come after us to say “good-bye,” for they were to go on by train that night to Nagasaki.

“The news from Peking grows worse and worse,” they said. “We must join our regiment with the least possible delay,” and with a hearty handshake they were gone.

It was thus that our pleasant party broke up, exactly a week from the day we had left Vladivostok. How strange it seemed without the kind Colonel and his merry Adjutant, and how we missed that useful Chinaman who had looked after our interests so faithfully!

The other gentleman, Lieut.-Colonel S——, remained at the Consulate in Yokohama. He called to see us several times during our stay there.

## Chapter XXII

### AT NIKKO—STARTLING NEWS

Donde una puerta se cierra, otra se abre.

CERVANTES.

AS the Amur begins to freeze in September, passengers wishing to travel by steamer must leave Vladivostok in August. We could not therefore allow ourselves more than three weeks in the "Land of the Rising Sun." After a pleasant stay at Tokio we went on to Nikko, and it was there that we made the acquaintance of the new Russian Minister and his family. When in St. Petersburg we had heard from Prince Hilkoﬀ that His Excellency M. Iswolsky was arranging to travel by the same route that we were taking, and our own Ambassador, Sir Charles Scott, had also mentioned him to us.

"You will be sure to meet them somewhere on the route. I will send them your cards and

## AT NIKKO—STARTLING NEWS

ask them to look out for you," Prince Hilkoff had said just as we were starting.

Madame Iswolsky was staying at the *Kanaya Hotel*, where we also had arranged to stay, and we sent her our cards as soon as we arrived. When we had had a little rest after our five hours' railway journey, Madame Iswolsky's maid came to say that her lady would be pleased to receive us in her own apartment.

"So you have accomplished that long, long journey in safety," said Madame Iswolsky, giving us a kindly welcome. "My husband was most anxious about you; he carried your cards in his breast pocket all those weeks. How is it we never heard anything of you?"

"You started just a week later than we did," I replied, "but you passed us while we were exploring the Steppe, and we never caught you up."

Then we related how we had met two gentlemen who had travelled with them—M. T—— at Krasnoiarsk, and Prince D—— at Blagoves-tchensk.



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"Prince D—— showed us a photograph he had taken of your party, and we heard of you at nearly every stopping place," I said.

"Yes, we were a party of twenty," replied Madame Iswolsky. "Besides my husband and myself and my two children there were the governess, the valet and his wife, and a Cossack soldier. I could not bear to think of my precious children falling ill in that wild country and no medical aid at hand, so I took a doctor. Happily he was never needed. Prince Demidoff from London, and his wife, also travelled with us and took a photographer with them. Then there was an English friend of theirs, Mr. L——, besides several other gentlemen, two of whom you met on the way. Prince Demidoff and Mr. L—— have gone to shoot bears in Sakhalin."

"I wish you could have seen the provisions we took with us," said the governess, an attractive young lady, whose name I forget. "We had a hundred and fifty bottles of Apollinaris water and any number of jams and preserves. They were most acceptable,

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for there were days and days when we could get no butter."

"There were, indeed," I replied.

"How did you arrange about a laundress?" asked Madame Iswolsky.

"I wore my blouses rough dried," I answered, and often felt ashamed of my appearance. Then I told them about the beautiful laundress at Stretinsk.

"We did not go to an hotel there," said Madame Iswolsky; "we went straight on board a government boat which was waiting for us."

We now spent a pleasant half hour looking at photographs they had taken on the way, and Madame Iswolsky gave me several for my book, including one of the Russian legation at Tokio.

"I hope we shall have the pleasure of meeting His Excellency," said my mother.

"Oh, yes, you will see him; he is to join us tomorrow," replied Madame Iswolsky; and here he is in the group we had taken outside our Siberian train. Here, too, you see our Cossack soldier. He was a useful man and I

## A RIBBON OF IRON

should have liked to keep him with us here, but his appearance so alarmed the Japs that we had to send him back.

M. Iswolsky arrived from Tokio the following morning. He was quite relieved to think the two poor English ladies had come safely through Siberia.

"I was afraid you might have got into some difficulty," he said, "as we heard nothing of you."

"The fact that we were ladies alone seemed to make people specially kind to us," I said, "and we met with good hearts under even the roughest exteriors. We have certainly no cause to complain."

I showed them the photograph taken at Otaru, and M. Iswolsky at once recognized Colonel D—— in spite of his civil dress. "I have met him in St. Petersburg," he said.

"You will have proper first-class carriages all the way from Stretinsk now," said M. Iswolsky. "I have received news that they are already on the line. It has just been opened to the public."

We were to leave Nikko at an early hour

## AT NIKKO—STARTLING NEWS

on Friday morning, and had already posted letters to our friends at home telling them that we were on the eve of our return journey through Siberia, when suddenly all our plans were changed.

At dinner on Thursday evening just as soup was being served M. Iswolsky appeared with a telegram in his hand. Instead of going to his own table he walked straight to ours, and said in a low voice to my mother, while all the other visitors looked on with curious eyes, "I fear it will hardly be safe for you to return by Siberia. I have just received a telegram to the effect that Blagovestchensk has been shelled by the Chinese."

Neither of us will ever forget that moment.

After consultation we decided to stay another day at Nikko in hope of further tidings.

M. Iswolsky left for Tokio on Friday afternoon. In the evening Madame Iswolsky came to our room for a last chat.

"If you call at the Legation to-morrow, on your way through Tokio, you will see my husband and get the very latest news," she said

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kindly. "I shall telegraph to him saying when he is to expect you."

Such a pretty and gentle lady was Madame Iswolsky—a countess born, and a countess every inch of her.

"I wrote to mamma every day," she said, "all the way from St. Petersburg to Tokio, and never once missed."

We could not help thinking what an interesting book these letters would make, and how different it would be from mine.

At the Legation we found M. Iswolsky expecting us.

"Here is an old friend," he said, and at that moment Lieut.-Colonel S—— made his appearance.

There was also another gentleman present. He was no less a personage than Father Nicholas the Russian missionary bishop, who has been labouring for so many years amongst the heathen in Japan.

He told Lieut.-Colonel S—— that there must be peace between the two countries if his good work was to prosper, for the mere presence of



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military men was a hindrance to his peaceful labours.

“There is no fresh news from the Amur,” said M. Iswolsky, but I will telegraph today to the Governor of Vladivostok and let you know the result.”

The reply came several days later and was forwarded to us on our return from Fugiyama. It ran as follows: “All passenger traffic on the Amur suspended.” At the same time it was stated in the Japanese newspapers that all the foreigners in Peking had been massacred, and that four Russian steamboats had been sunk by Boxers on the Amur.

Not wishing to run needless risks we decided, with much regret, to give up all thought of returning through Siberia, and took our passages in the first steamer leaving for America. We sailed from Yokohama on July 27 in the *Empress of Japan*.

Most of the passengers were missionaries escaping for their lives from China. Many of them had brought away nothing but the clothes they wore. It was a quiet and uneventful

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voyage of thirteen days. Once indeed some of us caught sight of six whales spouting in a row, an acceptable break in the monotony of the horizon.

“What *little* things please people on board ship!” a lady remarked, as she came on deck and swept past us scarcely turning her head in our direction.

One day while I was playing the piano in the saloon a fond parent approached with his little boy of five. Placing a chair beside me he said to the child, “Now you can play softly in the treble while the lady plays in the middle.”

The duet was a short one.

The stewardess was a woman who had seen better days. On one occasion she invited me into her pretty cabin, and entertained me with an amusing tale.

“During one of my voyages,” she said, “a widow lady of high rank was particularly kind to me. Wishing to make her some little return, I bought a few white flowers, when I went on shore at Victoria, and laid them on the table in her cabin.”

## AT NIKKO—STARTLING NEWS

“Oh thank you so much!” replied the widow, with tears in her eyes. “You have placed them upon my dear husband; he is in that little Japanese box on the table. I had him cremated just before leaving Shanghai.”

The chief sights of interest that we passed on our rapid journey through Canada were the glorious giant trees of Vancouver and the magnificent peaks and cañons of the Rocky Mountains. We spent a night at Banff, but mosquitoes and an overcrowded hotel were a drawback to that lovely spot.

We were much struck, amongst other things, with the feeling of equality that prevails in the Dominion. Once, at a large hotel, when we had ordered some tea in our bedroom, “Excuse my sitting down,” said the waiter, seating himself comfortably in an armchair, “but is there anything else I can do for you?”

At Toronto we bought a daily paper and read thrilling speeches on the trouble in China, that had been delivered by some of the missionaries in whose company we had crossed the Pacific. But it was not until several days later

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that we were relieved from our anxiety as to the fate of Peking.

Crossing Lake Ontario we spent a couple of days at Niagara. The beautiful falls surpassed our wildest expectations.

In order to appease the growing anxiety of friends at home, whose letters had just reached us, I had my mother's photograph taken at our hotel in New York, from which city we sailed for Liverpool on August 22. On the 31st of the same month we arrived in London, our journey through Siberia having developed into a tour round the world.

THE END.





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